The Birth of Psyche

Charles Baudouin

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The Birth of Psyche

WORKS BY CHARLES-BAUDOUIN

POETRY

En Sourdine.[1]
Eclats d'Obus.
L'Arche Flottante.[1]
Baptismales.[1]
Le Miracle de Vivre.[2]

DRAMA

Ecce Homo.[1] *
La Serve Reine.

CRITICISM

Tolstoï éducateur.[3] **
Le Symbole chez Verhaeren.[4] ***

ESSAYS

La Force en Nous.[5] ***
Suggestion et Autosuggestion.[3] ***
Etudes de Psychanalyse.[3] ***

[1] Editions du Carmel, Genève (Suisse).
[2] Editions Lumière, Anvers (Belgique).
[3] Editions Delachaux & Niestlé, Paris et Neuchâtel (Suisse).
[4] Editions Ciana, Genève (Suisse).
[5] Editions Société de Psychologie, Nancy (France).
* English translation by Anthony Kirby Gill (*in preparation*).
** English translation by Fred Rothwell.
*** English translation by Eden and Cedar Paul (London).

The Birth of Psyche

By

L. CHARLES-BAUDOUIN

Translated by

FRED ROTHWELL

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The publishers have requested me to introduce this translation to the British public: a somewhat thankless task for an author. Still, we must look on the bright side of everything; and the bright side, in this particular case, is the privilege of coming momentarily into close touch —for the first time—with a public towards which I feel extremely sympathetic. Indeed, how could it be otherwise, after flattering my vanity, as they have done? Now, it is always a pleasure to be able to chat with sympathetic people. Besides, I am quite willing to admit that a few explanatory words will not be out of place at the beginning of this little book, to indicate its relation—or lack of relation —with those of my works already translated into English. As it is entirely different from these others, a reader runs the risk of finding himself somewhat out of his bearings, as it were.

At the outset, I must beg him not to look in *The Birth of Psyche* for what it does not contain—always an unpleasant task, especially in a country where "time is money". This book is anything but a learned treatise on psychology or psychoanalysis. It is alike far more modest and far more ambitious: just a tiny corner of the heart, a little music of a very intimate nature. It may not be unprofitable to advise the British public of this fact, for up to the present they have learnt to know me only through my excursions into the domain of psychology, i.e. in the least important part of my literary work.

Here we have a somewhat paradoxical situation, one that often comes about when translating an author. That is first translated which is easiest to translate; the author himself encourages such a procedure. He holds in reserve his principal works; more particularly does he hesitate in the case of those in which the language, lovingly shaped and modelled

by himself, forms an essential element that even the best of translations may misrepresent. Thereupon the foreign public, who first become acquainted with an author through his less important works, form an erroneous impression which has subsequently to be modified. This paradoxical situation is my own with reference to my English readers.

Thus, the book of mine which has been most extolled in England is unquestionably *Suggestion and Autosuggestion.* In my opinion, the popularity it has won is altogether exaggerated; nor is there any mock-modesty in my saying so. Indeed, I sincerely rejoice at the decisive influence this book has exercised over certain individuals, whilst at the same time regretting the feverishly epidemic condition aroused among the general public by the success of "Couéism". True, to a certain extent, this is the fault of Coué himself, whose admirable charity makes the mistake of expending itself in a thankless propagandism, where the man runs the risk of

losing all his prestige and the doctrine all its rigid exactitude. It is also—and this more particularly—the fault of those enthusiastic admirers who, at all times, have been the worst enemies of any cause they have at heart. Indeed, I am anything but pleased to find my name also involved to some extent in this hurly-burly uproar, with reference to a book which was meant to be—and should be from its very nature —one of the most modest and unpretentious of my works. Such is the irony of fate.

I suspect that a goodly number of my English readers, who are acquainted with my psychological essays, know nothing at all of my literary and poetical work. In the present translation they will be afforded a taste of the first-fruits of this new garden. Translations of other works will follow.[1]

[1] The following works of mine will shortly appear in English: *La Force en nous*, essai philosophique, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul; *Le Symbole chez Verhaeren*, essai de psychanalyse de l'art (same translators); *Tolstoï éducateur*, étude critique, translated by Fred Rothwell; *Ecce Homo*, poème dramatique, translated by Anthony Kirby Gill.

I am aware that there are certain worthy pedants who will be greatly afflicted when they learn that where they expected to find nothing but a scientist they also find—*horribile dictu!*—a poet. My scientific works, which but yesterday seemed passable, will to-morrow be worth nothing in their opinion: for this is how such people judge. Well, then, since we are having a conversation, why should we not deal with a subject so debated, viz. whether the marriage of art and science may occasionally be recommended, and whether such a union satisfies the principles of sound "eugenics"—to employ the language of the day.

* * * *

Assuredly, I have not the slightest desire to see an increase in the numbers of those amiable dilettanti who flit from one branch of human culture to another without making a thorough study of any, those Don Juans of the intellect who would regard science as a fit subject of flirtation among many others. What I mean is

that the poet should look upon science as a diversion, not a *divertissement*, an entertainment. The hours I spent in studying science I regard as having been most earnestly and conscientiously employed. Indeed, the true artist is a man with a passion for work—and work done well. In whatever he may be doing he will manifest this passion, blending enthusiastic ardour with conscientious scruples, creative fire with workmanlike thoroughness.

The few pages at my disposal are all too short to deal fitly with an argument dear to me, and indeed to many another representative of our modern French literature. Along with Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe, many of us, as a matter of fact, think that an artist has every right to be, occasionally, a scientist as well. Has it not been said of Romain Rolland —one of the best loved of contemporary writers—that he is an encyclopedist ? He must, also, on occasion, have been a specialist ; while it may be remembered that he lectured at the Sorbonne. At the

Sorbonne also there is a poet named Edouard Dujardin who lectures on the history of religions. René Ghil—that Lucretius of evolutionism—makes science the very material of his poetry. Paul Valéry is interested in mathematics. Amongst the younger poets, Duhamel, Durtain, and Castiaux are doctors ; Antoine Orliac is an engineer of considerable scientific attainments ; Jules Romains pursues his investigations into the realm of psycho-physiology. All the same, it is not my business now to theorize on a tendency of our present-day French poetry, one in which I am glad to participate. All I desire is that this tendency should be recognized as a *fact*, and that it be accorded its right to exist—a condition with which, indeed, a fact can very well dispense !

This fact is not something individual, it is a product of the times. In the first place, it represents a reaction against romanticism, which has really all along been too distainful of science and reality,

infected, as it is, with a certain incurable foolishness with regard to them. It is also a reaction against excessive specialization, which our official-ridden civilization has encouraged more and more, until we are now beginning to discover signs of a terrible impoverishment of culture. And, lastly—it must be acknowledged, even though we have no desire to please the Marxists—this fact is also an economic one. In these days, the poet can no longer dream of living on his art; he must have a profession, and it is quite conceivable that intellectual professions are frequently those that prove most attractive to him.

* * * *

What will be the results that accrue from contact with science on the part of the poet? I do not think they can be very disastrous.

Too many people imagine that the artist is all ardour and *élan*, and that the scientist must be all caution and scrupulosity. Were that the case, no doubt

the two temperaments would be for ever incompatible. Such a conception of the artist, however, is nothing but false romanticism, and such a conception of the scientist is a very bureaucratic one. It has needed all the weakness and the unbalance of modern times to induce artists and scientists themselves to adopt so readily these decadent conceptions. Too frequently does it happen that the artist of to-day has lost all profession-consciousness and puts his trust in an infallible inspiration—occasionally quickened by a little morphia—whilst the scientist becomes an honest librarian, who spends his life in classifying labels.

Far be it from me to disparage sibylline inspiration or conscientiously classified labels, though I now smile when an attempt is made to make me believe that the former is the whole of art and the latter the whole of science. *Elan* and scrupulosity are both virtues that have their part to play, alike in science and in art.

Will the poet introduce anything of value to science?

For science, too, presupposes imagination and inspiration. It includes Newton's apple, the mathematical intuition of a Henri Poincaré—an intuition which presents itself to him, as he tells us, " toujours avec les mêmes caractères de brièveté, de soudainté, et de certitude immédiate." The relationship between scientific invention and creative imagination has long been obvious. It is the poet in the scientist that enables him to invent. Now, all great discovery is invention.

If such be the case, it is quite possible that the poet, from time to time, may inspire science with certain ardent elements, infuse in it a youthfulness it may occasionally need—while free to leave to others the task of bringing to a point, of focusing, what he himself has merely glimpsed. When Goethe observed the " metamorphoses of plants ", did he not prove himself the herald or precursor of evolutionism ?

Furthermore, the poet should not be too keen on ascribing anything whatsoever

to science. Whether he does so or not, it is quite certain he will receive something from science. In this school, he will assume—or resume—habits of methodical, patient, and plodding work which he has but too often abandoned, though these have ever been the distinguishing marks of a great artist. An extremely highly developed religious consciousness imposed these very habits on the old image-makesr of the Middle Ages, who shaped and fashioned the tiniest feature as though a god were watching them. Why should not a scientific consciousness impose like habits on the modern artist ?

Besides, science will afford the poet a new aspect of things. Indeed, this aspect seems as though it would assuredly become his in the near future, once the new contributions of science become popular and form part of everyday life.

* * * *

Will it be alleged that the poet will thus lose his spontaneous and naïve vision of things ? There is no such thing as a

naïve vision. Psychologists are aware that, when we perceive an object, we do much more than perceive: we interpret. There unwittingly glides into our perception everything we know and remember about the object. Laboratory experiments have proved that we read a word without noticing that some of the letters are missing, for our memory projects these letters on to the paper. All perception is of the nature of hallucination; we find it contains just what we ourselves put into it.

Our ancestors beheld the heavenly bodies as golden nails; but now that we know something of astronomy, it is impossible to look at the starry sky without imagining infinite and abysmal distances stretching beyond the constellations. The naïve vision of the universe possessed by a man of average culture is not so naïve as it seems; it bears no resemblance whatsoever to the vision of primitive man—and herein dwells the error of impressionism. The "naïve vision" of the men of a period contains in itself an entire metaphysic,

an entire "Weltanschauung" which is the summing-up of the science of the past—even though this be but elementary school science. The new discoveries of science are first of all theoretical and abstract, devoid of any direct hold upon life; it is only somewhat later that they will enter into the daily round of life. Then, they will admit of a new "Weltanschauung". This it is that the poet, once he becomes imbued with the science of his day, is perhaps capable of attaining a little sooner. It may even be one of his tasks to shape and fashion this vision for the humanity of the immediate future —and that in accordance with the laws of beauty. It may be that the "belles époques" are principally epochs inaugurated by great poets who traced out for them their own vision of the world instead of allowing this vision to come about in haphazard fashion, a mosaic running riot, bric-a-brac of the successive conquests of the human intellect.

Undoubtedly, if the poet always regarded

science from the theoretical point of view, his vision would cease to be spontaneous; it would continually be encumbered with abstractions. And, indeed, this occasionally happens, when an artist deliberately *wills* to employ his art to illustrate some particular scientific teaching: which also is an admissible art, though one that must not be abused. On the other hand, if the poet has *lived* the new science in his inmost being, if he has "digested" and assimilated it, if, without noticing that it forms part of himself all the time, he involuntarily sees things through it—then his vision once again becomes "naïve". But now it is a new *naïveté*, containing a little more innate truth than did the other.

* * * *

This lengthy digression—perhaps a very pretentious one—brings me back to my little book. In writing it, I think I have been as naïve and spontaneous as possible. I have forgotten what psychology and psycho-analysis taught me. Undoubtedly acquired knowledge has influenced my

vision; had I not been acquainted with psycho-analysis, should I have written as I have done—to quote nothing but this one instance—the chapter on "Parricide"? All the same, I do not think I have strained or exaggerated facts in order to have the pleasure of seeing them fit in with theories. All I have attempted has been to revive, in all their timid and delicately graded freshness, the first vague feelings of a child body in contact with the ambient air and of a child soul touched by the tender caress of life. These recollections represent no laboured effort; I jotted them down just as and when they came, and each came at its own date. Thus, in the course of several years, have I gathered these memories, droplets falling one by one and crystallizing at the bottom of a mysterious grotto.

I would ask the reader also to become very simple-minded, to bend very low if he would enter the grotto and find some charm therein. Let him once again become a little child, as though he would seek

entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Afterwards—but only afterwards and "into the bargain" so to speak—if he is a critic, a psychologist, or a pedagogue, he will be able to seek in this book an interest of another kind.

The critic, for instance, may like to investigate in what way a work of so intimate a character will help towards a better understanding of what is pompously called "the personality of the author". To prevent him as far as possible from going astray, I have given at the end of each "recollection" the date at which it became condensed in my memory with sufficient vividness to induce me to write it down. For it is now a matter of common knowledge that recollections—especially those of childhood—belong just as much to the present as to the past, and characterize equally well the moment of their evocation and that whose image they revive and resurrect. It is not at all by chance that a recollection is revived at one time rather than at another: this is

owing to secret correspondences between the moment at which one lives and the moment one lives over again.

As for the psychologist or the pedagogue, he will find, scattered about the following pages, some clue that may help him to a better understanding of the child soul, about which so little is known. If it be true that the artist is a man who, in some direction, has succeeded in remaining a child, he may quite possibly be our guide in that new country—so near and yet so far away—the land of childhood, where fresh discoveries await us at every step we take. The notes and observations on childhood made by a Tolstoi, a Spitteler, or a Romain Rolland are striking attempts to probe and fathom this many-sided world which ever evades our ken. The author is not so vain as to claim to rival these masters; still, he would be glad to think that these evocations of his early years may help some of his fellow beings to understand a little better what depths of tenderness, of mystery, and of suffering, are to be found in the soul of a child.

As for those—respectable pedants—who, at the mere mention of "poetry" smile a knowing and indulgent smile, it will be better that they read no further: it is indeed easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a pedant to enter into the enchanted kingdom of childhood.

CHARLES BAUDOUIN.

SACONNEX D'ARVE, PRÈS GENÈVE.
January, 1923.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Snow	1
II.	Visits	7
III.	Reviviscence	14
IV.	Evenings and Dawns	27
V.	The Terrors of Sleep	33
VI.	Steam Rollers	37
VII.	Parricide	45
VIII.	The Head	53
IX.	Ave Maria	62
X.	The Intruder	67
XI.	How Stupid People are!	83
XII.	The Deaf Woman and the Dancing Dolls	93
XIII.	The Shadow of Life	98
XIV.	Saint-Nicolas	103
XV.	The Devil	118
XVI.	Visions and Voices	128
XVII.	Crinolines	133
XVIII.	My First Class	143
XIX.	In which I Distinguish Myself	150
XX.	Beside the Question	157
XXI.	The School Bag	164
XXII.	My Little Wars	170
XXIII.	Poetry	186
XXIV.	The Anguish of Love	205

Chapter I

THE SNOW

THE snow is falling, heavy with the weight of the past.

Every year, about December, just when autumn is drawing to a close, when the snow is still a novel sensation, not yet blunted through our having become accustomed to it after the long winter months, memories fall softly into our consciousness, as do flakes on to the ground.

Why do the dearest emotions of our early years return at this season rather than at any other? Perhaps the deep and sudden silence of the snow is more propitious for their stifled voices. Then too, this down—from what angel-wings has it dropped?—envelops us with white, innocent as that of childhood. Outside the familiar window curtains, the snow weaves around the world other curtains full of mystery and spreading over the

whole of space as do those of a cradle to a child's eyes. But above all else, when the snow again begins to cover the ground, we resume our habit of crouching by the fire and shutting all the doors, as though we felt ourselves again wrapped in the soft white woollen garments of childhood that seemed so tender to the touch; we feel that we have re-entered the placid atmosphere of home life. Though there may exist other homes than that of childhood, at all events that was the cosiest, the warmest, the first Home. And does it not constitute the entire poignancy and charm of these early memories, to evoke this Home during the long and inevitably solitary stages of the years that have followed?

The memories, however, that the snow brings me first of all are of other days of snow. . . .

It was falling in gusty whirls, and the flakes were being driven in every direction; they were obstinate and capricious, they

chose the way they should take and had an object, then they allowed themselves to be diverted and suddenly came back. They turned quickly to right, to left, lightly romped about, or simply let themselves drop, then came down in a *vol plané*, rose a little and fell back exhausted. My eyes followed them; I understood all those little white souls, and sympathized with their myriad desires, their disappointments, and their childish joys. . . . I went with my mother through the streets of the town, those long, straight streets of Nancy, whose white footpaths showed the steps of the passers-by. The carriages rolled noiselessly along the road, like my toy tramcar along my bedroom carpet. . . . But the snowflakes ever drew my eyes above.

I lost myself in those swarms of white flies; I looked farther and farther in an attempt to divine the secret of their birth. But I could never see anything but the self-same white flies, fully formed and daintily winged, standing out against

the dull grey which completely filled the air. But previous to all this, higher and beyond, what were these flakes in the regions my eyes could not pierce ? And those that did not fall to the ground but were caught up in a giddy whirl, where did they go, after again drifting away in the darkness ? There were so many of them, an infinite number ! Where do you all come from, when you enter into birth ? And where do you go when you disappear ? . . . In presence of the unknown destiny of the little white souls, the anguish of a great mystery momentarily overcame me.

It was not long, however, before my imagination freed me from this sense of anguish. Like mankind, when called upon to account for the mysteries of life, so I created for myself a legend, a myth out of the early fantastic scraps of knowledge I had gleaned at school, blended with what I could remember of the tales I had heard.

" Look," I said to my mother, " all these are tiny white flies. They are

intelligent and quite tame. They are in hundreds and thousands, there are more than thousands of them, they cover the sky and are all over the land, but I know every one of them by name. . . . I know where they all are, and when I *think* the name of one of them, it comes up at full speed, you can see it suddenly darting out of the surrounding grey, it comes from far away . . . so far, far away . . . and yet it knows its destination ; that is why it comes along so quickly, you have no time to see how it is done. It recognizes me and settles down on my finger. See, here's one which is now in America, the other side of the world ; its name is Camaralzaman ; I call it by name and it comes and settles on my finger."

This was a name I had found in the "Arabian Nights". And I would improvise other strange names and call them out aloud, raising the forefinger of my right hand, and the little white flies would hurry up and settle on it like so many well-trained doves.

Assuredly this recollection is not anything unique, it is rather a "composite portrait" of many recollections which may well have extended over different winters. More than once have I had to begin this game over again, a game which was, maybe, one of the finest poems of my childhood, wherein already I was unwittingly expressing my faith in the power of thought and the magic enchantment of the spoken word.

"But where are now the snows of yesteryear?"

1916.

Chapter II

VISITS

Another composite memory, with the snow as background to the picture, was made up of my first New Year visits, when my mother took me by the hand to see her friends of childhood days, or to call on a few highly respected ladies in the neighbourhood. Mamma was close upon her fiftieth year, and naturally her friends were of about the same age. If they had once been mothers, their children had now left home, their husbands were dead . . . or away, and they themselves were old and lonely. The ladies on whom we called resembled them in both respects. We would also visit two old relatives, who lived together, and were even older than all the rest put together. They belonged to a far-away—an unthinkably far-away—world, a fact all the more certain seeing that they dwelt at the other end of the town, even beyond the custom-house, and

we had to walk a great distance along interminable and unaccustomed streets before we reached the great double-folding door of their abode. Their names were Madame Digout and Madame Faneuil, and these names, especially the latter, made me think of something faded or tarnished (fané), something shrivelled and old, thus further adding to their great age and the sense of distance they inspired in me. Madame Digout always spoke of her eczema; she would point to this disfigurement, a fact which impressed me greatly. It was all over her body, she said, "crawling about," and I would think of the malady as something alive, repulsive creatures running all over her skin and sucking up her blood. But instead of turning away my eyes, I was attracted, fascinated by the sight. I sat there stock-still on my chair, no longer kicking my legs about, but in open-mouthed wonder rolling my eyes from the ulcerated arm of the old lady to her lips from which I awaited words of explanation regarding

that strange thing of which human suffering consists.

These visits did not bore me; rather did they interest me as being peeps into an unknown world; they aroused within me a sort of inquisitiveness as regards wounds and sores, a curiosity that is somewhat unhealthy, perhaps even cruel and sadic in its nature, though assuredly very keen and alert in a child. Besides, these two women, in spite of their age, richly enjoyed life. Madame Faneuil more especially resembled one of those plump little attractive old women who remind you of a russet apple all shrivelled up (to employ a somewhat commonplace though expressive figure of speech), every wrinkle looking as if it were bursting with fun and laughter.

On the other hand, when in the presence of certain other ladies, though not so old and quite well in health, I was bored to death: a feeling that came over me even before mamma had rung the bell, and whilst I was waiting for the door to open,

with my feet in the melting snow. This waiting in front of certain doors seemed to me interminable, because these visits were tiresome even before they began. Why could she not open the door sooner, so that we might the sooner be out again ?

And yet these ladies, in whose houses I did not like to appear, would offer me as many sweets as the others, or even more. They said all kinds of nice things which simply irritated me, filling me with that feeling of annoyance usual in children when aware that grown-ups are assuming a childish and silly attitude in addressing them. The sweets I enjoyed because I liked them for their own sake; I felt no gratitude whatsoever to the one who offered them. I took them quickly, at the risk of appearing greedy, so as to cut short the pretty remarks which accompanied the offer, and I gulped down the compulsory " thanks " as I sucked the bonbon, at the risk of appearing—or even actually being—impolite. Now when I reflect on this, I believe my feeling of antipathy and

boredom was caused by my intuitive perception, in these good ladies, of an entire absence of consideration, a decrepitude of soul and a shrivelling of the heart. I felt that they had not grasped the meaning of life. How much more lovable was Madame Faneuil, whose face alone showed signs of shrivelling! With the others I seemed to be breathing an atmosphere contrary to my nature, something close and stifling.

I would beseech mamma not to take me with her on these visits. She promised to shorten them, and, as her promises were always kept, I gave way. But even the shortened visit proved a very long affair. One I especially remember, when we found ourselves in a tiny drawing-room on a rapidly darkening December evening. The approaching gloom filled me with an increasingly torturing impression of lost time. And as the obscurity filled my mind above all else, I would imagine it darker than it really was; then, thinking it was extremely dark, I touched mamma's foot

or her elbow to remind her of her promise and give her to understand that we must leave, thinking all the time that the lady would not guess anything. But she did, and she said so, actually pitying the poor little child who was tired and bored, and offering him a sweet to teach him patience. How I would have liked to fling the sweet in her face! All the same (was it from gluttony or from the embarrassment that a refusal would have occasioned?) I took it, without daring to look her in the face. I was angry with her and I was also angry with myself; I was both furious and ashamed.

And so we went about from one house to another. Every time we stepped into the hall, every time the street door opened upon a gust of driving snow, I liked to feel my tiny body pass from cold to warm, from warm to cold, in the keen voluptuous thrill of the sensation. The pure white vision of the snow and the chilling moisture as it pierces one's shoes, the shivering gesture with which, once back in the street,

I clung close to mamma, and finally the pervasive odour of *bonbons fondants* and chocolate cream: such are the memories I have retained of these afternoons of my first few winters.

1916.

Chapter III

REVIVISCENCE

Just now the snow brought before my mind the soft warmth of a white garment in childhood. The memory of this now becomes more definite and clear.

In our children we are born again. Reminiscence, reviviscence. These constitute the reincarnation of childhood. Our earliest impressions, the very ones that have been longest forgotten, spring to life in a single gesture, a word, an attitude of the tiny being who is a repetition of ourself. How innocent this unconscious imitation wherein is revealed one of the profound and obscure laws of life! To encounter this phantom of ourselves moves us strangely; to see it so living and real that we imagine we have again become itself; its actions and gestures, our very own, are again faintly outlined in ourselves, we again adopt that very mannerism which we seem to have exhibited but yesterday,

as though all the years between had suddenly faded away.

* * * *

Yves my son toddles along, more shakily than usual, on the moving deck of the steamer that carries us away on the lake. He is two-and-a-half. He feels very awkward moving about alone in his white cape, with very uncertain foothold among so many big strange legs! . . . Suddenly, I remember: I was about the same age and looked just like that. I wore a white woollen crocheted dress with a tippet. I was that little living round bundle, somewhat awkward, too, and lacking in assurance among so many things and living beings. I saw but few people. Being seldom away from my parents, whenever I happened to be alone among strangers I was sad and ill at ease. It was as though the ground were sinking from under me (like the deck of this steamer), and the very daylight, in actual fact—for I am not now speaking figuratively—became dull and gloomy.

We were on a visit to my godmother, who lived in a small town close by. My parents were in the habit of taking me there once or twice every year. But this time, it was all strange and new to me still. Not altogether so, however, and I have a feeling that I recognized where I was, as though I had been there in a previous life —for a few months, at that age, constitute a veritable metempsychosis. Certainly, there were around me several unknown faces, or rather several unknown legs and feet, since I was again like a wee kitten which has to make its way in and about people's legs and is disturbed by the goings and comings of those great threatening objects. To one at my age, people exist mainly in the lower parts of their bodies; dresses and trousers have quite puzzling intentions—stupid maybe, or again on the other hand, very profound—as they move about and finally come to a dead stop. The feet are the organs of such intelligence as they possess. When the entire mass is about to move, it is the feet that are the

first to stir; they twist round and point in the direction which the whole is about to take. Thus it is that the feet have a prophetic rôle; they are a sort of antennæ, noses more or less cunning and pointed. It is the feet that know, the feet that must be questioned.

When the child's looks travel higher, with an uneasy desire to understand and to pass on to a court of final appeal, they see the entire person as a sort of sugar-loaf, on the top being perched the head, small and far away, pale and misty, making droll grimaces and apparently belonging to a less real order of things.

And so I moved about among several of these unknown sugar-loaves . . . not altogether unknown, but so dimly recognized that the impression was even more disturbing, owing to the disconcerting mystery of so obscure a reminiscence. My godmother's family had numerous ramifications. These spread over three adjoining houses, including each floor and the adjacent buildings. I was taken from

one to the other; we traversed glass-covered courtyards, stores, and back-shops; nothing seemed on a level with the ground; we were going up or coming down steps all the time. From the crude light of the courtyard, which dazzled our eyes, we suddenly passed into a dark, gloomy basement. All this stir and confusion put me out of my element. There was one thing that pre-occupied my mind from time to time at this early stage of my life: I would see the same shop, now the front, now the back; the courtyard, now from the ground level, now from each successive floor. Was it the same shop, the same courtyard? I recognized the things, but they had changed; they had either rolled up or stretched out. It is anything but a simple matter for a child to guess so many puzzles. Madame Artus relates as one of her earliest recollections the sensational discovery she once made when she came to understand that her father's desk was but a single object, whether seen from the front or in profile.

They had cleared away the twelve o'clock lunch, and meals in this house were copious and plentiful, enhanced by that substantial bourgeois joviality which is characterized by loud speech and unrestrained laughter. The voices and noisy ways of all these people tired and disconcerted me, a tiny child accustomed to silence. I suspect that on this occasion, as we left the table, I was already somewhat dull and cross-tempered.

Follows the event I have in mind, for all I have just related is doubtless an amalgam of several visits to the same house; it does not present itself before me with that original characteristic of being a unique experience suddenly brought back to life. I now come to the memory distinctive of that day, when I was as young as my own little boy and wore the self-same dress with its white cape.

I can remember the dull mental atmosphere immediately following the long midday meal, just when everyone has finished eating tart. Then the adults

dawdle over their cigarettes, their coffee and glass of brandy, not knowing what to do with the children. My godmother's brother-in-law, however, had the reputation of being able to keep them amused. He was a lively and enterprising young man, fond of a joke and able to descend to the level of a child's understanding. The idea had come into his head to take me somewhere, along with his son Georges and his niece Madeleine. Both were big children, in my eyes, for they were quite four years of age, and Georges was in breeches. I was not sufficiently acquainted with them to be at my ease ; as a matter of fact, at this period I always felt more uncomfortable with strange children than with grown-up persons. The " monsieur ", however, who was now with us did not altogether succeed in making me feel at ease. Georges called him papa, and Madeleine called him Uncle Charles, and these two names given to the same individual added one more puzzle to all the others that had been troubling me

that day. I can see again those long striped trousers' legs, striding along by my side. At times I would look higher, and then I saw, quite a long way off, the little head that looked so unreal, with its mobile features, as though continually being fashioned anew in the flickering light of the eyeglass. Out of the reflections came a voice, speaking to me. I understood nothing. I recognized words, but the dull and somewhat special *timbre* of the voice engrossed my attention. I could not grasp the sentences; its language was Chinese to me. Besides, I was too perplexed, too uneasy to understand. I was full of questions it was impossible to put in words. At that age, a child's vocabulary is so limited by reason of all the questions that are slowly being framed within his mind! In answer to the voice speaking to me, I very likely assumed that dull stupid air so often seen in children when confronted with strangers: a mask of stupidity that serves to conceal a whole world of anxious attentive thoughts, all

the more burdensome from the fact that they possess no words that they may use for purposes of self-enlightenment and self-expression, for getting at the bottom of a mystery. Philosophers wonder if it is possible to think without interior words. Of course it is possible ! But such thinking never comes to anything. The tiny child thinks without words, but such thinking, being vague and uncertain, is all the more intense ; the skein of thought, which cannot be unwound, weighs like lead on the heart. I remember that my mental condition that day might be compared to a blind alley, entering which one is filled with a choking sensation, or to a dull shooting pain when one is half asleep, or again to a vague, horrible nightmare from which there is no escape. Impossible to express what is stirring within me, to free myself from it. Is it going to last for ever ? It appears to me as though I should need pages to write down, at the present time and in the language of an adult, all I was then feeling and thinking.

Where am I being taken? Who are these strangers? Why are these two children so joyous, so completely at home with this "Uncle Charles"? No doubt it calms me somewhat to see how good-tempered they are; they take me by the hand, and I let them do it. All the same, I do not somehow feel in tune with them. I see nothing—no one—that I know. . . . Oh, yes, just now, behind me (for the past is one with that-which-is-behind, and space and time are yet almost the same to me), just now, behind me, there is—there was—the dining-room with all its din and hubbub; there was mamma. She was in her chair, having turned aside from the table, and sat facing me. She had gently encouraged me to go with "Uncle Charles" and the two children. I had looked up without understanding, held out my hand, and gone. (At all events, I would wager that this is how it happened.) Then in our wake there had been laughter and jesting remarks the whole length of the table, with reference to our three little personalities—

more especially my own—seen retreating from the room. I was too proud to appear hurt by this laughter ; it merely added one more link to the chain of things I did not understand. I thought it all rather unseasonable, for I was not feeling very gay. . . .

They had left the dining-room ; mamma's presence had faded away, and then things had seemed pale and insubstantial as when a cloud appears in the sky. I still heard behind me, in memory, faint echoes of laughter, but I could not tell whether this was memory or the actual disappearing in the distance. I only felt more separated than ever from the group of people and things which included mamma. It all went ever farther and farther away in that-which-is-behind.

We seem to me to have been walking a long, long time ; but perhaps we have crossed only two or three rooms, and it is quite likely that the well-lit and somewhat dazzling space where we come to a halt, is nothing more than the glass-covered

courtyard; at the time, I suspect such is the case, though I am not sure I recognize the place; besides, I have no time to examine the matter thoroughly. Without interior words, if thinking is possible, it is difficult to keep in check the thought that would escape. I feel this problem gradually fading away, without my having the strength to arrest it in thought; it passes somewhere into the background of my mind, for in the fore-front are other problems of a more disquieting nature: Why are we told that we must wait, why are we exhorted to practise patience? In order to keep me quiet, Madeleine amuses me like a little mother, and is proud of her rôle. In the stillness, I am more acutely aware of the void around; I feel lost. Uncle Charles indulges in strange gestures, of which I can make nothing.

I have come to the critical moment of this recollection of mine; though I fear that now it is no longer a memory, for the incident has frequently since been related in my presence. Besides, there exists

a photograph to prove it, and there I stand between Georges and Madeleine, in my white woollen dress, exhibiting that pitiful wry expression which is the harbinger of tears in a child's face. It appears that I burst out crying the very instant Uncle Charles snapped me. I do not think, however, that I distinctly remember this psychological moment, either because the memory was blurred by the various accounts given to me, or because my feelings were just then too keen, too heavy a burden on my mind. I still *know*, without—strictly speaking—remembering the fact, that we were urgently requested not to tell mamma we had been photographed, for the intention was that this should be a surprise for her, and it is quite possible that the idea of the incident being kept secret from mamma was what caused me to burst into tears. I had to do my best to keep the secret honourably, and yet I betrayed it, saying that someone had shown us a little bird.

1922.

Chapter IV

EVENINGS AND DAWNS

I snuggled beneath the bed-clothes. The sheets were clean and fresh, and I was aware how nice they felt. Whenever they had been changed I did not fail to notice the fact, and I would say to mamma: "The bed-clothes feel as soft as silk to-day." I stretched out my limbs and changed to another part of the bed, so that the delightful sensation of freshness might last the longer. I liked to feel myself so small in so large a bed. Only in winter did I draw up my legs, and then mamma, passing her hand over the mountain made by my bent knees, would say: "If you want to be warm, you should stretch out your legs and then the blood will run right down into your feet." And under the dual persuasion of gesture and voice, the mountain disappeared. I was invariably obedient, but now, when thinking over the past, I admire the way

in which mamma, with a word, could always make me understand the why and wherefore of her orders. I never knew the meaning of passive obedience.

I had said my prayers before going to bed. But so much had happened since! Mamma was anxious that I should think of God the last thing before falling asleep. This is the prayer she repeated aloud every night, telling me to say it mentally with her: "O God! keep us from peril and misfortune; grant us Thy protection through the night hours." Nothing sublime about these simple words, but what other idea of God would have been more completely within my understanding? Listening to these words as they fell from my mother's lips, I was conscious all around of a sense of infinite goodness which dispels suffering and grants calm repose and quiet to all who will simply trust and believe.

In the same big bedroom—where during some illness or other I occupied the largest and highest bed—slept papa and mamma,

each in a small bed; mamma's was a folding-up bedstead, mine a double-sized one of walnut. In my parents' eyes I certainly counted for more than two, especially whenever I was ill. This I looked upon as quite natural. I did not feel grateful, though brimming over with affection and a sense of contentment . . .

Everybody was now in bed; the little *Pigeon* lamp lowered to a night-light, with its flickering beams, summoned into being the dancing blue sprites on the ceiling and the more terrifying phantoms that lurked in the sombre corners of the room. Then I would say the following words, invariably the same: "Good night, papa; good night, mamma; sleep well, all three of us." I was especially fond of these last four words, in which I divined the close warm intimate bond that united "all three of us" in its embrace, a bond which I felt I was drawing still closer at that final moment, so that all-conquering sleep, which unlocks all things, might not unlock *it*.

My parents said good night in reply, and

I would lie for a moment gaping at the fantastic forms on the ceiling. I heard papa's breathing becoming more regular; he was just falling asleep; he must scarcely be thinking of anything now; he must no longer be thinking of me . . . O God! What if this silence were to last for ever! What if we were never to wake again! What if the words that had just left our lips, whose echoes I still heard reverberating in my heart, were the last we should ever say to each other! . . . I did not summon up the idea of death, but I was terrified at the thought of something unknown slipping away, at feeling the precious bond that linked together our three souls loosening in spite of all I could do. . . . Then something would shrivel up within me, and I was determined to tighten this bond once more as I repeated in the gathering silence which intensified the volume of the words I uttered: "Good night, papa; good night, mamma; sleep well, all three of us." And the familiar answer again reached my ears, papa's voice

containing an accent of tenderness I can still hear. The same thing was gone through a third time, after the interval of a few moments which seemed to pass very very slowly. Then mamma would gently murmur: "Go to sleep now, darling."

The heavy, sombre hand of sleep closed upon me, and when it was raised, I found myself transported in a flash, as by enchantment, to the wide-awake brightness of rosy-tipped morn. My parents were up. I did not wonder how that had come about. Were they not my Providence? Ought they not always to be at hand, when I awoke?

Mamma came to my bed, and made me kneel down on my pillow. My first thought also must be offered to God; and this was no longer a prayer, it was an exaltation of my whole being. All I now said was: "O God, I give Thee my heart."

I happened to remark to mamma that it was not very logical to give God my heart every morning in this way. That this might be possible, must I not also say

every evening: "O God, I take back my heart?"

All the same, I was very fond of giving my heart to God. When I uttered these words, kneeling in my night-dress, the morning light shining full in my face, I identified myself somewhat with the little angels; my soul was filled with radiant brightness, and the very atmosphere gave out light and music.

Mine, too, was another joy: mamma would take me in her arms, my long, soft, white night-dress covering the whole of my tiny body and even enveloping my feet. Carrying me to the dining-room, in front of the calendar, she held me so that my hand could tear off the previous day's motto. Thus did my baby-hand play with the great mystery of time, and as I found such pleasure in stripping petal after petal from the flower of the passing years, I never imagined there would come a day when the man would gladly arrest this eternal process and sadly let the leaves of his autumn fall of themselves.

1915.

Chapter V

THE TERRORS OF SLEEP

O the mysteries of sleep!

Who can describe the fright of a child when he reflects for the first time on that black vertiginous hole into which he sinks every night? . . . It is then that the ground slips away, I feel myself gliding down a declivity on my back, falling . . . I recover self-possession and clutch hold of something; I open my eyes and see the bed-clothes, the wall, the night-light with the flickering circle it casts on to the grey ceiling; I hear the breathing of my mother and my father . . . No, indeed, I am not lost; to-morrow, when daylight returns, life will go on as usual; the window-blinds will clack, you will hear the newsvendor call out his papers; by sitting up in bed you will even see the poor lame fellow hurrying towards the footpath opposite and raising to his lips his brass horn, dinted in one place, and all dim with his breath and the early morning mist. You

will hear him shouting in the old familiar tone and rhythm: "*L'Impartial, L'Est Républicain!*" You will hear the early carts rumble along, and the milkman ring the bell so vigorously that he makes us jump, and papa gets angry; he rings the bell like a country clown who must do everything in rough-and-ready fashion, for he is fond of indulging in vigorous exercise after his early morning round on the highway. You will hear the milk cans clash and clink against one another on the corridor flags, and the jingling of silver and copper coins . . . perhaps a few of them will roll on to the flags.

Assuredly I am not lost, and yet . . . Oh, that black hole into which I must plunge! Those hours and hours during which the clock is quietly going "tic . . . tac", and will soon be striking as though there were nothing the matter, those hours during which the breath comes and goes in our calm, quiet breasts, where, nevertheless, so stupendous a mystery is taking place! Only to think that these hours leave behind

ing for us to remember! Has nothing ppened during their passage? Nothing? /hat is that? Dark blackness once more, ence, ever silence. And that I should longer be here, to know that all is black nd silent. To be no more, is this possible? . . If I could but know when I fall asleep! I'll just keep watch for the very instant itself and see what happens when one enters the darkness . . . No, no, sleep approaches with stealthy, treacherous steps, in the rear, and when I find myself gliding down the slope, I am already asleep; I have been in the blackness for I know not how long. I was no longer in being, and yet I was, for I was afraid. But how frightful not to be able to see myself fall asleep! What! All this takes place in my bed, in myself; I am there, listening and looking within myself; and then, all at once I perceive that I was not there any longer, that a thief has stolen me from myself without my knowing it! It is horrible to plunge into that black hole . . . And I became so afraid that I deliberately

kept myself from sleeping; every time sleep began to steal over me I jumped up with a start, determined to see right into myself, and I forced myself to be wide-awake. This lasted . . . I know not how long. Moments of anguish draw out to an interminable length; in my case, this torture even lasted for ages; it may be that on certain nights it actually did continue for hours; I scarcely think so, however, for then I should have remembered the striking of the clock. The one thing certain is that the awful feeling returned every night; I always dreaded the approach of bed-time. For one or more periods, at various times in my childhood, I have thus nightly lived over and over again the terrors of death, and if ever I become aware that my last day on earth has come, I do not think I shall suffer as I did then . . . Nevertheless, the implacable sleep of childhood always overcame in the end, after a desperate struggle in the silence: the wrestling of a Jacob with the angel.

1917.

Chapter VI

STEAM ROLLERS

And so sleep did not always present a peaceful aspect to me. While dreading that black abyss, I also dreaded the dull, grey visions which at times filled it nightly with their horror. After all, how do I know that I did not myself, to some extent, summon up these visions in an unconscious intention to fill up the black void, and substitute something, however horrible, for that intolerable sense of nothingness ?

For years that nightmare haunted me, that nightmare of the "steam rollers", the origin of which is buried in the far-away past.

What I called by this name consisted of tall women, slender and fair, who came gliding one by one towards my bed. For in this dream I was always in my own real bed ; around me was the room in which I generally slept, so that I cannot strictly

say whether these were real dreams or hallucinations. The women came from far away, each of them alone and having nothing to do with the rest. All advanced with the same invisible gait, for their grey dress, which seemed of the colour of dust or of soft mauve-tinted ashes, concealed their feet which I never saw; they glided rather than walked, thus adding considerably to the sensation of fright which they inspired in me. Their faces were of the same hue as their dress.

Stealthily they came—though I heard them before I saw them, for they said, "chu, chu, chu," like the steam rollers that crush stones in newly-paved streets; and this mysterious sound, steady, regular and imperturbable, terrified me above all else. At each of these "chu, chu", they glided forward a step. They passed quite close to my bed, and I trembled for fear they should notice me; I held my breath as my eyes followed them about; some of them passed without seeing me. "Saved!" I thought, but already, at the

farther end of the room, I heard the feeble and still distant breath of the next one, and anguish once more filled my heart. At last, one of these women perceived me, leaned over the bed as my mother was in the habit of doing, and remained there in mute contemplation. It seemed to me as though her very touch would have utterly destroyed me; I was in the state of the child in the "Erlkönig" ballad . . . a song which subsequently endeared me greatly to Goethe . . . Sometimes, too, the woman would speak to me, though always in a whisper, as phantoms might be expected to speak. This froze my blood with terror, and I cried aloud in my distress.

I am aware that this obsession dates far back in my life; these women, who glide along instead of walking, remind me of a question I once asked my mother. This question was so naïve that I must have been quite small at the time, and so well do I remember it—without ever having heard it mentioned in the interval—that it must have expressed the mental condition

of a strangely puzzled child. I had asked my mother if women had legs. I know, too, that the " steam roller " obsession was an actual fact, when sleeping in my little iron bed, in the middle of the room.

Later on, the same obsession pursued me as I lay in the large bed. Then, however, I found an inviolable refuge in turning to the wall. The " steam rollers " were in my room, to my left, but on my right " they " had no power over me (this was why I long thought I could not possibly sleep except on my right side). Cowering against the wall, with eyes closed and face hid in the bend of my elbow, I heard behind me the everlasting " chu, chu, chu ", whilst before me, in the utter blackness of the night, the ghostly images filed past. They were small as pictures, in a far-away space that had no distance, and they passed along in an interminable grey procession. This did not frighten me so much, though sometimes, in the rear, one of the real women—of whom I had nothing but the image in front of me —would bend over my shoulder, and then

I saw the image in miniature also bend over something.

They all resembled each other and had the same gait and colour, seldom had one or the other of them features which distinguished her from her calm and daintily slender sisters ; she might be shorter, more plump-looking, and bearing a faint resemblance to my mother, though the expression on her broad face was anything between a sneer and a grin.

In the same large bed, when I was ill with fever, the nightmare returned in broad daylight ; then I was quite awake and the whole thing was certainly an hallucination. Besides, the vision was fainter than at night-time ; in order to manifest at all, it had to borrow matter from real objects. On each of the two windows in the room were double curtains, fastened by means of rings on to a rod, though as a matter of fact they were never slipped along the rod but remained in adjoining angles of the room like two columns of cloth in grooved folds. One of these

columns, while retaining something of its form, became the steam roller, advanced a few paces with the "chu, chu, chu" sound, and then collapsed on to the floor before disappearing altogether. On looking up, the curtain column was still there, and issuing from it was another phantom which met with the same fate as the first.

As regards the real steam roller—the source and origin of the obsession—I imagine I see it in a street which was then newly made and had just been paved: the Rue du Grand-Verger. Whenever I think of the women of my nightmare, I also think of this roller; it is there I see it, and nowhere else, in front of the house where Marie lives, the little—or rather big—companion of my childhood, for she is more than three years older than myself and appears quite tall, seeing that she has to stoop to kiss me. Here is the street, which contracts into a lane a little farther down, and there are the grey garden walls in which the mattock has made big white gaps, there are the work-sheds

and the new houses. The roller crushes the stones into the yellow mud, it advances undisturbed, with its "chu, chu, chu", it is so enormous that it could easily crush me into a pulp. It is going towards the end of the street, the end which overlooks the cemetery, you can see the crosses on the gravestones over the wall . . .

* * * *

Strange vision wherein is blended the terror of death with the first faint stammerings of awakening love, how often has it passed to and fro in my childish mind! And, may I say it? this atmosphere of shade and sorrow, of grey and mauve, of moanings and whisperings, permeates and envelops the whole of my first book of poems, *En Sourdine*:

Les heures de nos jours sont comme les sœurs grises
Qui marchent dans la rue à légers pas feutrés
Et qu'il est triste et doux, le soir, de rencontrer
Aux carrefours muets que l'ombre tranquillise.

Elles marchent sans bruit et paraissent glisser
Sans poser, dirait-on, leurs pieds que des plis
voilent . . .

Do you recognize them . . . these grey hours and grey sisters? The same impression is also given in another poem:

Amour, . . .
Mot chaste aussi comme un pas de visitandine
Entrant dans la chambre de l'âme avant le jour . . .

For such is the vision which spontaneously came back to me, the first time I ever attempted to express the dual mystery of love and death.

1917.

Chapter VII

PARRICIDE

I have often wondered why, in childhood, I suffered so little from that abnormal calm to which I was subjected by my father's illness and old age. And yet ?

There is one dream . . . from far, far away . . . which comes back to me, and that with singular vividness. It stands out, in all its offensive and galling crudity, on the dark background of the long nights of childhood. I do not know how old I was at the time, but I could believe that it took place only last night . . .

The action of this dream is very simple : it is open daylight, and I have just entered the large bedroom where " all three of us " sleep. Occasionally . . . though but seldom . . . it happens that I cross the threshold of this room in the day-time, and then a sense of religious emotion takes possession of me. For the room, familiar

enough at night when my parents are there and I say my prayers in the dim light of my small lamp, is cold and desolate during the day and sounds quite empty. I stealthily enter, softly opening the door, both from an indefinite sort of fear and in obedience to instructions.

This is how, in my dream, I cross the threshold. But this time the room is not empty, and yet it is more desolate and cold than ever. My father is there . . . but my father is dead. He is lying stretched on his bed or rather, if I remember aright, he is in the iron folding-bed in the middle of the room, whereas my father's own bed, with wooden bedstead, was alongside the wall. Yes, it must have been an iron bedstead, and the corpse seemed to me to be in a cage, a prison . . . a prison isolated in the centre of the great desolate room. Is this cage-bed my mother's, or is it the one I had in my earliest childhood, my little bed which stood there unprotected by the wall, with the result that my nightmares

came—horror of horrors!—both when I slept on the right side and on the left, and I did not know where to turn in self-defence?

My father is dead, and his body lies imprisoned in that iron cage-bed of torture. I am both terrified and delighted. I feel the joy of vengeance. And I seem then to know, as I enter the room, that my father is dead: I have entered for the very purpose of looking at him.

In my terror I step away from the bed, but on again reaching the door I am filled with diabolical joy. "Now," I say, "I can bang the doors as much as I please." Whereupon I start forward as though to run out of the room, and something within me, in my breast, my muscles, my very throat, gives utterance to a shout of triumph. I breathe freely . . . with a consciousness of revenge and liberty.

On remembering this dream the following day, I felt horrified with myself, concealing this imaginary parricide as though it were a real crime. Never did I relate the

incident, but the memory of it remained as vivid as genuine remorse.

* * * *

With this memory I must compare another, and . . . a plague on chronology! —I have now almost reached my ninth birthday. My father has been on the point of death; he has received the Last Sacraments, but now the crisis is over. To-day, he is to leave the house for the first time. He, mother, and myself go very slowly along the alleys of the cemetery of Préville which is quite close to the house. Respect for the dead, very deeply rooted in Lorraine, has turned this cemetery into a rich park, covered with flowers. The alley of the Hauts-Sapins, transplanted from the Hautes-Vosges, so full of life and rugged strength, that of the birches, shimmering in the summer sun, the dazzling marbles, and the chatoyant scintillation of porphyry; and the stately exuberant ivy, such as my father would like to have covering his tombstone should it one day come to be neglected; and the roses, all

of which he knows by name: tea roses, Bouquets de la Mariée, Belles de France, with their all-pervading odours; and the birds, of so many different kinds, blending their songs in a peal of sound; and above all the chaffinches, whose song my father taught me to recognize as the harbinger of fine weather: "Ki ri ki ki ba tis pou you," and that foretelling rain: "puî," as well as the one which prophesies frost: "pic"; and the baskets of flowers on the trimly cut grass around the wreath-decked monument erected in honour of the soldiers who had died in defence of their country; the baskets of rich plants and the aucubas with their shining green-and-yellow-mottled foliage; and the geraniums manifestly pleased with themselves; and the red and pink begonias and the drooping fuchsias: all this superabundance of life, acting as a cloak to death, converted the cemetery of Préville into a veritable promenade.

When convalescent, my father was very fond of this walk, because of the numerous seats on which he could rest. Now, we had

just been resting on one of these forms, and my father and mother had got up and gone on very slowly along the alley. I had remained behind on the seat, preferring to indulge in a daydream all alone for a few moments and then catch them up. I watched them go farther and farther away, and it all seemed so strange—passing strange—these innumerable tombstones, and those two alone on that straight path, beneath the dim moving arch of tall trees and in the summer sun, my father and mother, becoming smaller and smaller, talking to each other, their words now indistinct and then again quite audible. My father had to lean his left arm on my mother's arm and his right hand on a thick stick, and I wondered that he should utter such simple, familiar words, that he should move along so quietly, as though everything that took place this summer day were not at all strange and did not infinitely transcend the average daily life. There was my father, the very man now wearing that grey serge suit

which I called his pink clothes. Yes, this man now quietly walking along had only the other week been at death's door; a little more, and he would have been, to-day, under one of those gravestones where lay men who also had been living and had perhaps worn pink clothes and chatted away as he is doing just now. My father and mother must be extremely good to be able to walk about and talk so quietly amidst things so incomprehensible to me; yes, indeed, what troubled me must be perfectly clear to them; never should I dare to confess that they amazed me, for then I should appear to them stupid and very strange myself. No one had ever told me to be thus amazed; certainly no one thought so but myself. And I repeated aloud the words, "almost dead," as I stared at the back of the pink coat, now quite a speck in the distance. I was conscious that all was becoming even more singular still, as I heard my own voice utter these words in the echoing stillness.

And as I spoke them there came back to me a sort of faint image of the feeling I had in the dream that my father was dead. I felt a certain delight in dwelling upon this idea: "almost dead," in picturing myself in that pink suit as under the roses of the cemetery, as flesh in a state of decomposition. And I wondered still more at the thought; I reproached myself for it, and was very glad that my father turned round to summon me by waving his stick. I jumped down from the seat, and ran along as fast as I could; the rapid movement took away my breath, prevented me from thinking, and rid me of the obsession. Coming up to my parents, there followed the normal course of events, wherein strange happenings and unnatural feelings have no place. My father smiled quietly and spoke to me in somewhat broken accents—emotion seemed always present in his voice—and I found myself caught up in a flood of tenderness and love.

1917.

Chapter VIII

THE HEAD

I had made the discovery that my shadow increased or diminished according as I drew near to or went farther away from the light.

Every evening, Marguérite, our servant, took away the lamp to light it in the kitchen, leaving the lamp-shade in the dining-room on the oilcloth table cover.

Then she brought back the lighted lamp, dispelling the darkness . . . She had not yet put the shade back in its place, and as she had left the door open behind her on returning, the whole of the kitchen was lit up with a ruddy hue, somewhat dim and shaded. The projecting closet, which contained the water-basin, was lit up, and farther away the light grew dimmer still as it fell on the stair door.

One evening, just at that moment, I conceived the idea of a little scene which I played over and over again, many an evening.

I said: "Do not put back the shade and do not close the door." Then I went into the semi-obscurity of the kitchen, right to the other door near the stair-head at the end. My shadow was flung on to it, right opposite me, and was of exactly my own height. It was distinctly outlined, in spite of the distance of the lamp and the scanty illumination. I could see, almost, the shadow of my hair. Then I summoned mamma: "Look at the shadow of my head . . . Say: Oh! what a dainty little head, I wish it always looked so small." Mamma repeated the lesson with the utmost docility. I continued: "Now the little head will grow bigger, and I want you to say: 'What a pity it could not be prevented from growing any bigger!'" Then I began to walk backwards. The shadow, increasing in size, began to frighten me, so that I hurried forward again. It assumed that monstrous aspect of immensity which the Latins expressed by the word *immanis*, and which I put into my own language when I exclaimed: "Oh! what a big, ugly

head ! " Ugly, because it made me afraid, and I wanted to revenge myself by disparaging it ; ugly, too, because its outline became blurred and indistinct, like ink beneath an ineffective piece of blotting-paper, and the tiny details which a moment before had charmed me by their delicacy and fineness had now disappeared.

The growing shadow made the entire kitchen darker, and all I now wanted was to hasten back to the well-lit dining-room, to be safe with my parents and Marguérite. I retreated, drawn backwards by a kind of *vertigo*. Interested in my play, it really seemed to me as though I could no longer prevent the head from growing. Did there come to me at that moment an intuition of the inevitable life urge, of that law which makes us grow by blunting the infinite delicacy of our original sensibility ? . . . I beat a retreat ; in my flight backwards I missed the direction of the door and mamma had to utter a word of warning : " Take care not to run into the wall." At last I crossed the threshold, and at that

moment the shadow filled the whole kitchen, the stair-head door, the closet and the ceiling.

I made it diminish by moving farther away, but this was now mere fun and did not fill me with the same emotion of dread. It was an emotion I might have avoided, but I rather liked and invited it, for I began the same game again and again. I would have prolonged it considerably had not mamma and Marguérite lost patience. The shade was put on to the lamp and the door closed ; no longer was there any obscurity, any mystery, but just the ordinary round of life by the family table. After a few moments' quiet reverie in the falling dusk, we each resumed our wonted occupation ; the very lamp worked away quite seriously ; you could hear it produce its light with a regular little noise. When the shade had been adjusted it was as though the lamp had bent its eyes over its work ; it had no longer any time to tell me more of its interesting though terrifying tales of twilight and shadow. The kitchen

door was shut upon a whole world of enchantment.

* * * *

This vision of the big head reminds me of another similar one, which startled me even more, because it was unexpected. Nothing terrifies a child more than does something enormous in human form.

I was at the hairdresser's, a small and narrow shop which I regarded as a glass palace. It delighted me to see every movement and gesture of each individual customer reflected ten, twenty, and even more times in endless perspective. I played at making faces—very secretly, of course, and when I thought no one was watching—with the object of seeing them instantaneously multiplied in numberless reflections of myself. The attendant had just finished cutting my hair and doubtless thought he would amuse me by suddenly placing a concave mirror right in front of me. I do not think I screamed, but I recoiled, felt myself becoming red and breathless, incapable of speech, beads of cold sweat

standing on my forehead. Sensitive to ridicule, and humiliated by the laughter I distinctly heard and must have imagined louder than it really was, I was determined to maintain a dignified attitude, and so made superhuman efforts to appear as though I, too, were laughing. When I discovered that I had been afraid of myself, of my own face, disproportionately magnified by the magic mirror, I was more ashamed than ever. Twice or thrice they exhibited before me the object of my fright, to induce me to dispel the phantom by touching it. In spite of everything, however, the original impression remained connected with that little mirror; I could never see it approach me without a feeling of dread, nor look at my reflection in it without a sense of terror. The utmost I could do was partially to master the external signs of my emotion, because of the people present.

The next time I went to have my hair cut I was again shown the mirror. This was sufficient to make me utterly detest

hair-dressers' shops, which, indeed, I had never regarded as enveloped in an odour of sanctity. For, with all due respect to the beauties of the glass palace, I knew no greater torture in the world than to feel a man's hand, now ice-cold, now moist and damp, frequently damp and cold at the same time, knock my head about (as though my head were any sort of a thing !), turn it in every direction with a sharp jerk of the thumb, and compel me to listen to the harrowing dialogue between clipper and scissors, close to my ear. This provoking hand even took delight in opening and shutting the scissors several times in succession, without cutting a single hair, so far as I could gather. Indeed, there could be no greater punishment for me, unless it were the punishment of awaiting such an experience. The hairdresser, exchanging with his clients talk that was wanton and too highly spiced for my understanding; the coarse, self-satisfied laughter of these men who did not appear to find the time drag heavily, and looked upon the whole

thing as quite natural: this completed my exasperation; it was the last straw.

As though it were not monstrous: not to be master of my head, which I felt to be my very own, more than all the rest of my body. I would not compromise regarding my head; it had every right to be left alone. Just think of the tyranny of parents, of society, of that element of authority I dimly felt all around, both compelling and disgusting me!

Nor was the hairdresser the only one I detested, with his moist hands and his execrable scissors. At home, the day before a holiday or a reception, mamma was in the habit of tying up my hair in paper-curls. These also I looked upon as intolerable. I dared not be too angry with mamma while she was torturing me in this way; she was but the instrument of the punishment; neither could I accuse fashion or convention, things too abstruse for my childish imagination. The whole of my resentment fell upon the so-called good God who made Sundays and holidays so

that mammas could pull the hair of little boys with hair-curlers, or else upon my uncle who was coming to lunch on the morrow with the sole intention of making me suffer the previous day . . .

This conviction that my head had the right to do as it pleased would appear to have been held by me when very young indeed. For long I could not endure to wear a hat, and mamma would relate that even in my baby-carriage I never would keep anything on my head; no sooner was it placed there than I angrily tore it off and flung it on to the ground. If my nurse was obstinate, I, too, was obstinate, so that she had to give way to me in the end.

1916.

Chapter IX

AVE MARIA

It was in my very earliest years, out in the garden in the month of May, when the evenings were cool, and roses and dewy strawberry flowers filled the air with perfume. Jeanne was my first companion ; perhaps she had been born in the house, at all events she had lived there ever since the first few months of our life in common. Jeanne was for long the only child who shared my emotions and joined in my games. Supper was over. The supper things had just been put away in the kitchen, which was already growing dark in spite of the open window. The swallows were making their last flights for the day. The music of the fair came in snatches from hurdy-gurdies and shows, softened and mellowed by distance, the result being a vague impression of swelling harmony. Eight o'clock . . . The *Mois de Marie* rang out from the neighbouring

church, and we both stopped playing as we joined our hands and said aloud, the one slightly after the other: "Je vous salue Marie." And our mothers would appear at their two windows, sometimes without leaving the plates they were drying, and would admire our simple act of piety. Then, from floor to floor, they exchanged some pleasant greeting or other and withdrew into the darkness, where the sound of water could be distinctly heard dripping once again into the sinks.

In my childhood I was fond of praying to the Holy Virgin. A cousin of my mother, whose name was Maria, had died when I was still very small . . . perhaps about four years of age. I went with my mother to see her when the end was approaching. Excited by fever, her violent gestures shook the bed, and her tragic words made a great impression on myself as I stood there motionless. She seemed possessed of a spirit of denial and rebellion, and was full of hatred towards someone, though passionately devoted to my mother.

I just looked at her, without understanding what it all meant; feeling only that she loved us and detested someone else. She did not want this "someone" to come into possession, once she were dead, of things that she herself prized. She entreated my mother to prevent this from happening. It was to *her* that she wished to give the things . . . even to give them straight away, to make sure of it. My mother answered with gentle words of protest. Then the dying woman would suddenly rise to her knees on the bed, all unmade and disarranged. In one of these passionate impulses, which somewhat frightened me, she unhooked from the wall a Virgin Mary, and placed it in my mother's hands for me. Then she turned to me and her voice, which but a moment before had been a maddened choking scream, again became natural and calm all the time she was speaking to me.

It was a Virgin Mary of which I was very fond; I had often pointed to it as it hung above the bed, for it had two

brass folding doors which could be opened and shut like a toy window . . . It was *this* detail that interested me most.

I kept this ikon. It could either be hung up on to the wall or placed standing, somewhat inclined, on one foot. I put it on a little table and made a little altar all around, consisting of two pairs of vases filled with flowers. Then I knelt down before it to say my prayers, and at night, before getting into bed, I closed the shutters of my Virgin Mary.

Marie ! A name on whose fête-day my mother celebrated her own. The name of my first nurse and of that big girl friend I loved when I was four . . . Hail to thee, Marie, patron saint of my pure though passionate childhood. My childhood . . . something narrow and deep as that peaceful little lake in the heart of a forest of my native Lorraine, and from whose bank can be seen a chapel of the Virgin. Childhood unstained and sequestered, beneath the protection of my mother . . . childhood, one might almost say, of a little girl who

sometimes feels a warrior heart beating within her breast . . . Jeanne, Jeanne d'Arc, Marie . . . Oh, that the whole of my childhood had been a *Mois de Marie*!

1921.

Chapter X

THE INTRUDER

Behind the house, behind all the houses in the street, were gardens, all of the same length, the back walls of which followed one another in a single grey line surmounted by old red tiles and only occasionally broken to make room for a palisade. Beyond, was another set of gardens, though not so snug-looking, not so shady, and with fewer flowers: kitchen-gardens in allotments of little uneven squares at a yearly rental. Yet farther away was a second enclosure, entirely fenced off, with a footpath running the whole length, and quiet unobtrusive men, bare-headed, going up and down, attending to their cabbages and their gooseberries and currants. Still farther were other gardens, belonging to Crousse, the horticulturist, famous in his day, though his gardens were too far off to interest me. The last houses in the next street, the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, with their

tiny windows and little red lights at night-time, seemed the end of the world, as far as I was concerned.

It was winter, one of the earliest winters of my life—the fourth at most—and the old, old snow was quite young in my eyes. I was looking out of the dining-room window which overlooked the above-mentioned gardens, and my father, who was very fond of this window, was standing by my side, his head inconceivably high, so that I had to throw mine quite back in order to see it. From time to time he would stroke his beard, looking mechanically in the small oval mirror which was suspended from a nail between two panes of glass: the little mirror he used for shaving, and up to which I would occasionally ask to be lifted, thus affording myself the momentary illusion of being as tall as my father . . . the little mirror, with the chipped glass, which, it appears, had once had a leg to stand upon, like my Virgin Mary, but now had to be hung up . . . the little

mirror whose origin my father . . . his hair was now turning grey . . . once smilingly related to my mother in my presence. The story somewhat puzzled me, though I gathered that the mirror was a present he had received long ago from some wicked woman, a woman, I subsequently discovered, who was a native of the same district as himself, and whom he was to have married when twenty years of age . . . and then, something had happened, and the whole thing was no more than an idle memory.

And yet, at the recollection, my father liked to dwell on his past youth, the village of his childhood, just as he liked to stroke his beard occasionally. Then his glance would wander away to the kitchen gardens : this, too, was a view he liked, for it reminded him of his own youthful days, when he was learning gardening. I, too, liked the window and the view it afforded : those quiet, modest gardens that were always the same . . .

Now, this morning, I was watching the

snow, whose magic had made the old garden scenery beautiful and new, though I recognized some of the familiar lines beneath their legendary disguise. I admired all this nature which could assume unexpected wonders in my eyes and yet remained what I loved and knew so well. The palisade, however, each pale covered with white on the side where the snow had driven, impressed me greatly; it reminded me of the iron railing over the railway bridge, away down in the town, the railing along which I was often taken for a walk. The alternation of the rails and the spaces between produced a strangely dazzling effect, varying with the speed at which we went along, and lashing my eyes as with a rod of light. The blinding glare of the snow had almost the same effect upon me. Of course the palisade was formed of great lumps of wood, rough and dented, going up and down, jog-trot fashion and of their own freewill, whereas the railing consisted of bars of iron, uniformly slender and correct,

like my big friend Marie. No matter; I quite believed that the iron railing had somehow made its way down to the gardens. To my mind, the railing consisted of a certain dazzling of the eyesight, and the palisade of snow danced about before me in like fashion: that was enough. Nevertheless, I was astonished at never hitherto having seen the railing from this window through which I looked every day; I was also astonished not to see the bridge and the passers-by as well, the puffing and snorting trains and locomotives: nothing but silence and the white snow.

Long did I remain silent myself, looking and trying to solve the problem, though I never succeeded. True, I knew that things, according as you are nearer or farther away from them, higher or lower, and even according to the weather, are not invariably the same. Still, the railing was a very puzzling proposition . . . It must be the fault of the snow, that unexpected fairy who had come along

during the night and had arranged things otherwise. All the same, I did not understand. The snow seemed to me full of mystery; things were bound to fear it, and to be silent because of their fear. In all probability I also held my breath, and this made the mystery more oppressive still, and my chest and neck incapable of performing their natural functions properly. I felt myself growing very bad-tempered behind the moist window-pane, becoming, in fact, quite introspective and metaphysical. And I cherished a grudge against the railing for having invaded my gardens; or rather, perhaps, it was the thought of my childhood's fairy world being invaded. Indeed, I was very sad and gloomy.

Henceforth, all the same, the intruder had gained a foothold. The iron railing had been transported to my Arabian Nights' gardens. Yes! A thousand and one nights! That must be the number of the days and nights of my early childhood: days and nights of undiluted fairyland. Then come reflections on the reality and the solidity of

things; then you become serious; a new and grave era begins, and like all beginnings it is also . . . even now . . . an end, and that is sad . . .

Suddenly, I remember a dream I had in childhood. Drawing upon my earliest recollections, I see that this bridge railing means something else as well. In this dream, Marie, the little girl of whom I am so fond, is with me on the railway bridge, and we are looking down between the rails at the trains and engines that puff, puff, like the steam rollers in the Rue du Grand-Verger, in front of the house where Marie lives. In the station there is a great deal of stir and bustle, something strange and unusual. I am amazed at what I see, and I speak to Marie somewhat as follows: "You see how funny they have made their trains to-day." Displeased, she answers in a prim, correct, "young lady" tone of voice: "Whom do you mean by 'they'?" "The workmen." "Well, what if they have?" I find this reproach very bitter, for my big friend certainly thinks I am very

childish and rustic, and that I speak badly . . . And when I again evoke this dream, I reflect that Marie's father works in the station office. All this must be mixed up with my iron railing, perhaps, too, with my iron bedrails when the steam-roller nightmare terrified me so much? Already it was a case of love and its obsession. It was all this, too, that had invaded my peaceful gardens in the Arabian Nights, wherein hitherto fancy alone had throned it, fancy that knew nothing of the outer world.

Ah! That early snow, what tricks it had played! It had changed everything into silence while my soul slumbered: the snow which carries me back every December to my childhood days and which every year I see spreading afresh its nuptial mystery over the face of nature.

* * * *

Another memory, at the same window, whilst looking in the direction of the gardens, with papa by my side. A moment ago, I thought it was that very day. The

past came right up to me whilst I was meditating and writing, and now it seems as though they are two distinct events, united only by the resemblance of the impression left. Thus it is—never have I so clearly perceived it as I do now—that our memories, more especially those of childhood, become blended with and superimposed upon one another, however little they express the same mental disposition, the same attitude towards things; they stretch out their hands across days, months, years; they unite in one single image, which is far more a portion of ourselves than an event experienced. Memory is an artist. Just as a painter who, through a crowd of faces dimly glimpsed, creates an expressive type, a fiction truer than reality itself, seeing that it condenses reality and saturates it with life; so does memory with our recollections. I can well understand how difficult—if not impossible—it is to write one's own autobiography, especially that of one's early childhood, in which dates and references are lacking.

The title given by Goethe to his recollections was : " Dichtung und Wahrheit."

Papa, as he looked across at the kitchen gardens, had growled out in an ill-tempered tone of voice : " That beast of a Crousse ! " I had stretched forward to see the beast, and as I saw nothing, I fixed on papa a questioning glance, for his bad temper prevented my speaking to him. Mamma, who had understood the allusion, said laughingly : " He wants to see the beast." That proved sufficient to make papa unbend, and I now understood that the beast was only a metaphor.

Crousse, the horticulturist, had succeeded in business by creating new species of begonias, of varied form and colour. Now he was selling his land and opening up a street parallel to our own. Building had begun, and papa was incensed against " that beast of a Crousse " for spoiling our view. Naturally, I shared my father's resentment, and even felt indignant on my own account. I saw they were going to make a new street, like the Rue du Gran d-

Verger, and that would mean new houses and men engaged in sawing stones; it would mean rules and lines, and smooth corners. Everything would be exasperatingly white. What right had all this to come and take the place of my gardens? Like the railing, this new street also was an intruder. And the feeling of sadness again came over me.

Now this year, my fourth, was a time when my birthplace was being converted into a large town. New streets were springing up everywhere. There were being installed electric trams, destined speedily to replace the trams hitherto drawn along in jog-trot fashion by old horses. I have a very distinct recollection of the first electric tram I ever saw. It was mounting a very steep little street, opening on to the station square. I was with mamma, watching from a distance, in the utmost amaze. I pointed to it and leapt about as my mother held me by the hand. Admiration prevented me from speaking and brought the tears into my eyes.

One evening, a few days afterwards, my mother and myself were in the horse tram, the trotting animals dragging it along in the old familiar way. A few yards behind, on the same rails, an electric tram was being tried. It was close upon us. One or two simple-minded old dames from the provinces—dressed in black cloaks and in the style in vogue at the end of last century—who happened to be in our car, showed themselves terribly afraid of the monster, and asked the conductor if the electric tram could stop at any time, and if there were no danger of our being run over: the slightest risk, and they would prefer to get down and lose their four sous. The conductor smilingly calmed the alarm of the worthy dames. Mamma reassured me also and I regained confidence. Besides, it was quite true; the monster could stop itself, just like an intelligent being. It came running after us, and then, before reaching us, stopped short, starting again when we were a little distance ahead. It was a jolly old thing at bottom, just amusing itself and

not intending us any harm. All the same, there was a grain of fear mingled with my admiration.

On returning home, I conceived the idea of playing at trams. One of my possessions was a little chest of drawers. It was not new—for my mother had had the toy as a girl—but I thought it very fine and the wood was bright and shining. This represented the electric tram, and a small, low wooden form, all rough and dusty, represented the old van. I enacted the scene of the pursuit, the threatened crash, the fright of the old dames and the reassuring answer of the conductor.

Now this game reminds me of another I played later on. I was a restaurant keeper, the proprietor of the Hôtel du Coq Gaulois. I received my parents as clients "at table No. 36, reserved and suitably warmed". This was our dining-room table, on which I placed a number, whilst the drawer represented the heating apparatus, the principal innovation. The game was suggested by our occasional trips into the

country, when we dined outside some village inn and the fried meat quickly became cold : more especially at the Grand Jéricho inn, by the cool banks of the Meurthe (I thoughtlessly called it " Jéricho ", instead of " cocorico " or " coq gaulois "). I was not satisfied, however, with playing at being a landlord. Fond of drawing as I was, I sketched my hotel over and over again, transformed it, made additions, and then drew one that was half new and half old. The left half of the front was old and grey, chipped away and falling in pieces ; the other half was lofty and white, with large, well-outlined windows. To my mind, the intention was that the old part should be pulled down, and gradually the new building would rise at the expense of the old. This bore considerable resemblance to the scene of the two trams or to that of the iron railings and the palisade.

But the electric trams were first favourite. Mamma informed me that the ticket collector was no longer called a collector, but a " conductor " (a stupid change, seeing

that he did not conduct anything at all) and that the conductor had been promoted to be " wattman " or driver. And I remember the day—I was still in my fourth year—when my mother taught me this barbarous name, which I had some difficulty in pronouncing, though I finally succeeded after repeated attempts. It summed up in my mind inevitable changes, promotion both for my town and for myself, something grand, though dreaded, that was opening out, and at the same time the irretrievable end of all that was dearest and most intimate in my life.

Scaffolding had begun in the Rue des Bégonias. On its white front, the corner house bore a date which I looked at every day for months afterwards, when passing that way: the date of my fourth year. That date I thought of as pregnant with vague memories, full of painful significance. It is those memories I have just evoked, more particularly that of the Intruder, whom, in my inmost soul, I have never quite forgiven for obtaining possession

and driving me out of the gardens of my life.

And now I know the origin of my long-standing resentment against large towns and cities, against the intrusion of English words into my mother tongue, against the invasion of modern ideas and standards on every hand.

1917.

Chapter XI

HOW STUPID PEOPLE ARE

Have you ever noticed how stupid people are? By "people", I mean those who do not belong to the family or the household—the profane—who know nothing of our way of living and have the impudence to live differently. Habits which to us are the warp and weft of every day, the words and deeds that fill up the minutes and hours, in a word, all our various ways of doing things, which all the same are evidence of virtue and the only wisdom in life: all this is a dead letter to them. To us they are heretics, though they do not seem ashamed of the fact. They are not aware that, outside our own home, there is no salvation whatsoever.

My parents were not what is called narrow-minded, and yet their ways of thinking—at least, my mother's—were slightly bourgeois. There was no bitterness in her judgment of others, poor woman, she had no bitterness in her

nature, and yet certain ways and manners which were neither her own nor those of her parents or her Aunt Pauline really did shock her slightly. Those who did not act like ourselves were perfectly free, of course; all the same it would have been far better for them to do as we did. And whenever I heard her criticizing such people, I fully approved, I even went further than she did. I did not understand how it was that others could not live like ourselves. And I would say to myself: "How stupid they are!"

For instance, our neighbour cannot tell you anything without exclaiming aloud, raising her arms on high and uttering shrill screams, as though there were a fire somewhere: now that is not the right thing to do. There is nothing peaceful or calm about her. She does not pay the butcher or the grocer at the time she makes her purchases; the result being that whenever you happen to be returning with her along their street she suddenly leaves you and takes another turning

to avoid passing before their shops. Certain of our friends, who have children with whom I play, live in a very irregular way. They retire late one night and early the next. They go to a concert, and never think of putting the children to bed before eight o'clock, as they ought to do. As a result, the youngsters are turbulent, and their nerves are all unstrung; the mother is the same, and is frequently hysterical. They get up at noon, and at night the beds are not even made: there is no order anywhere. The same people, at the river-bathing season, go to Cinq-Piquets, whereas it is well known that the Grands-Moulins baths are far better. Other friends buy their clothes ready-made at the Galeries Nancéïennes, though you can be much better served by the old pimple-nosed tailor who takes your measure, or by the laughing, good-tempered dressmaker who calls once a week. (By the way, I am very fond of a chat with her: she calls me "Petit bout de chou", to which I answer: "Petit bout de carotte.")

There are also people who wash their linen every week just behind the house, in a clothes' steaming copper. (These last two words, used by those who did not live as we did, seemed to me particularly stupid.) Others send their soiled linen to the big steam laundries, and these burn it ; whereas it would be far better, as in the old days, to have big, square, well-filled closets containing spare linen, and to employ, three or four times a year, no one but Madame Bouillet, the laundress at Crône, on the banks of the Meurthe, whose mother and grandmother had all along been in the habit of attending to the family linen. How stupid people are not to know that, as are those who have obstinately made up their minds not to do as we do ! *We* : for I was convinced I had something to do with *our* linen being taken to Crône, something to do with the Grands-Moulins baths being chosen, and with *our* clothes being cut to measure.

All the same, I was far more annoyed at the stupidity of people when they

disregarded not only our family, but even my own little world, the world of my toys, and later on of my school things. Here, everything—both the things and their names—was precious to me; so important a part did they play in my life! My usual gestures and movements were so perfectly adapted to my familiarity with these objects, these names occupied so large a place in my soliloquies, that I could not tolerate anyone being ignorant of the former or changing the latter. For not only did people know nothing of my small world, but the profane creatures actually spoke of it in a stupid, ponderous tone of voice, and even with a condescending air! They deserved to be smacked!

Ducks and drakes was a favourite amusement of mine: pieces of paper bent in squares and points to form feet and beaks after a certain pattern which mamma showed me, and standing erect on the ground. I was passionately fond of making ducks: very large ones out of grocers' screw-bags and tiny ones out of tram tickets.

Then I set them on the floor, in order of size, behind one another. This procession in Indian file took up the length of various rooms, and passed under two or three doors. Papa, who was fond of striding up and down a room, sometimes gave them an impatient kick. As a rule, however, due respect was shown to my poultry-yard of which I was very proud. Now as it happened, there were some people, and even children, who had learnt to fold paper differently, and to make ships. This hurt me somewhat: a touch of envy, most likely; but the feeling disappeared in my haughty compassion for the stupidity of others who could not make ducks. As though it were permissible not to be able to do that! Others, too, thought they were giving me pleasure by saying of my ducks: "Oh les belles cocottes!" and this irritated me extremely. How stupid they are, I thought, not to know they are ducks, but to call them such a silly name as "cocottes"! Sometimes—it depended on the importance of the

person—I dared not reply, but on other occasions I had no scruples whatsoever and exclaimed indignantly: "They are not cocottes, they are ducks!" All the same, no one ever took the matter seriously.

Then there was my fortress, which the old Jewess, our tenant, called "a fort". The idiot! It was a fortress, not a fort. Though so tiny a mite, I insisted on it, whereas she, the old witch, knew nothing about it! And there was my game of house-building, which I did not like to hear anyone stupidly call "a game of bricks".

When my little girl friends, whom I highly esteemed all the same, spoke to me of their school work, neither the things themselves nor their names were the same as those used at my school. On such occasions, I thought my friends very stupid; no doubt they had the same opinion of me. When I informed Jeanne that at my school we did "*ab*ditions" and subtractions, she thought she would deeply

humiliate me by remarking that, at the boarding-school she attended, they did problems or sums (opérations)—something far better. I was almost sure the contrary was the fact. A little later, Marie spoke to me of " general history ". Evidently she wanted to outshine me, for at our school we learned only the history of France. But she did not succeed, and I concluded that general history was stupid. As mamma had explained to me in the matter of " opérations " (for after all I was not quite certain, and had told mamma what Jeanne had said to me), I took for granted that general history also must be a very pretentious and showy expression, meaning nothing at all. I could no longer be intimidated with words. And when this same Marie informed me that she was learning " théorie ", and I identified this very erudite subject with nothing higher than arithmetic, I again looked upon Marie as stupid, or, if not herself—for I was fond of her—then her boarding-school, at all events. The deuce! Why

not call things by their names? Names formed part of the things with which *I* was familiar.

Moreover, I, too, liked to show my superiority. I remember having yielded to this sin of pride shortly after my first confession—when I was between six and seven years of age—but I did not regard it as a sin. I had gone over my confession with mamma, and mamma was relating the incident a few hours afterwards to a lady who had called:

"The almoner asked him if he was a glutton? He replied: 'No, but I am fond of good things.' And the almoner laughed."

I wanted to add a little witticism of my own to the conversation. Since mamma had assured me that it was not a sin to be fond of good things, and that doubtless Monsieur l'aumônier was also fond of them, I thought it rather smart to repeat mamma's phrase:

"Yes, I am fond of good things, like Monsieur Vaté."

I said "Monsieur Vaté"—a thing I never did as a rule—and not "Monsieur l'aumônier", for, to my mind, the lady was certain not to know the almoner's name. By saying it aloud I should prove my own knowledge and her ignorance.

As a matter of fact, she had not understood me, and so she asked mamma:

"Like whom?"

I thought mamma's reply would confound the lady and I anticipated a triumph. Mamma, however, who had not heard me very clearly, blunderingly replied:

"Like Monsieur l'abbé."

In my annoyance, I corrected her:

"Like Monsieur Vaté."

Mamma was forced to explain that this was the almoner's name. Then came my triumph. My joy had something more in it than vanity. I had proved to the lady her own stupidity. She was speaking of things that concerned me alone, and actually made fun of them. That she had no right to do; she knew nothing about it, and I had simply put her in her place.

1918.

Chapter XII

THE DEAF WOMAN AND THE DANCING DOLLS

A memory lost in the mist of the years; one that must go back to a very early age. It came to me the other day, out on the road, in the course of conversation. How long ago it is since the thing happened! It seemed as though I must have plunged deeper than usual, that I was entering another mysterious circle.

It was in the house opposite ours. A deaf and dumb woman was living there, all alone. Probably I saw her only once or twice. I picture her again as short, somewhat stout, of uncertain age . . . in fact, not easy to describe. She must have been of a cheerful disposition: to me, at all events. My mother was present, and another person, a mutual acquaintance, one of our neighbours who was acting as interpreter. I have a feeling that my mother was not in the habit of visiting the

deaf woman, but that we had been taken there on some special occasion. It is even my impression that my mother refused to take a seat.

What I *do* remember is that the deaf woman seemed quite pleased at showing me her one curiosity: cardboard dolls suspended from the ceiling near the middle of the room and in the corners. These constituted her bell, and when anyone rang, all the dolls began to jump about together and make the same movements, like soldiers at drill. When a louder ring was given, they frivolled and romped about, with comical jerks, like dogs shaking themselves after a swim. Someone—the neighbour woman—must have gone outside to ring the bell and so enable me to see the mechanism at work. It may be—one more impression added on to the visions of this recollection—that the deaf woman made a hobby of exhibiting this curiosity to all the children in the neighbourhood, that this hobby was her only joy in life, and that I was there on that account.

Had my mother and our neighbour spoken of this hobby in my presence ?

From time to time the deaf woman would give utterance to a hoarse, inarticulate sound, which greatly puzzled me. She made signs with her fingers, bending some and straightening others, just as my mother did by lamp-light when making Chinese shadows for me, twisting her hands about so that the shadow cast on the door should resemble heads of cats, gazelles and nibbling rabbits, a speck of light representing the hole for the eye. The only difference was that the deaf woman made all these gestures in the daylight, thus upsetting my preconceived ideas. They informed me that this was her way of speaking : a statement which merely increased my astonishment. Into what strange world had I entered when crossing the threshold of this room ? This lady must have a very good time, seeing that the ringing of her bell set dolls dancing, and that she spoke by the aid of Chinese shadows in broad daylight. And yet they told me that she was to be

pitied, and I was vaguely conscious that this was the truth. But I could make nothing of it; I even gave up seeking and questioning, preferring the charm of the strange and the inexplicable. In the presence of this mysterious lady, I felt a kind of respect, half religious, half bashful: a state of mind which was mainly exhibited by the semi-immobility of my legs.

Was not this life, which made me think of Chinese shadows and Punch-and-Judy shows, a *life-shadow-of-life*? It is really that which charmed me and at the same time made me feel ill at ease . . . But I have something more to say of the Shadow of Life.

1917.

Chapter XIII

THE SHADOW OF LIFE

The place was the Galeries Nancéïennes, the vast tailoring establishment to which I preferred our old family tailor, just as I preferred Madame Bouillet to the machine-worked laundries. This large shop, for advertisement purposes, had organized the first cinema shows ever given in our town. It was a great novelty; everybody was going there, either that day or the following. People spoke of it in the street: "Haven't you been yet? You must go."—"We will."—"The rapidity of the vibrations hurts your eyes."—"A fine thing, all the same!"—"What wonderful times we are living in!"

I was not four years old. Or does this figure come spontaneously to my mind because this was the year in which all the other novelties took place: electric trams, English words, the white houses in the new street running alongside of the gardens? It is of no consequence.

The stores occupied several floors. We had booked our seats on the first. This formed a sort of amphitheatre, with a railing of smooth shining wood which I can picture to myself. Leaning over, you looked down on to the ground-floor, just as you see the pit from a theatre gallery. The canvas screen was ruffled from time to time, like a sheet of water beneath a slight wind. A little below my own level I saw that great magic square on which all eyes were fixed, and I expected something marvellous to appear. It was a solemn moment; all ordinary occupations were interrupted. The saleswomen stood at their counters. In imagination I see them again, looking somewhat like the women who conduct you to your seat in a theatre. They have long scissors hanging from the waist and swinging about on their apron, while the salesmen are engaged in covering the windows and making the place dark . . . We are now in semi-darkness; a few slender beams of obtrusive daylight, only, piercing through. These white streaks look like wires as they zigzag before our eyes.

The rapidly moving pictures now cover the screen. Men move hurriedly along the streets, vehicles of every kind appear in the flickering light; a stout man, walking straight towards us, seems of enormous size when he halts in the foreground, rolls his eyes about and looks as though he would come right out of the screen: this sends a slight thrill of fear all over me. It may be that there were also trains plunging into tunnels or steaming out of them. I was with mamma, and I think there must have accompanied us a lady friend who had a very pronounced Lorraine accent. She was somewhat of a peasant in her manners, and loud in her exclamations of surprise and enthusiasm.

Papa was not there, he accompanied us but seldom. He had been about a great deal in his life, and novelties no longer attracted him. So he stayed at home, reading the paper. We would find him there on our return, and he liked me to give him an account of all we had seen in the town. It was a greater pleasure for

him to see with my young eyes than with his own.

On this particular evening, there was, indeed, something to relate. As usual, we had tapioca soup. The dessert must have drawn out to an inordinate length. Very likely we partook of hazel-nuts from our own nut-tree, taking them out of the little canvas bag with which we went gathering them, and passing the nut-cracker from hand to hand. On the round table, with its four legs which were anything but symmetrical, was spread an oilcloth, one corner of which was becoming frayed (I was fond of scratching the strands with my finger-nail). On the oilcloth stood the lamp as usual, with its demure-looking shade, quite one of the family. The blinds shut out the garden. Nothing could be heard outside, all was calm and secluded. And there, in the intimacy of the small dining-room, mamma and I told of our experiences as we finished supper. Our words appeared to flow down into the silence of the lamp, and the silence gently

laved them in its golden stream. Everything was so peaceful that you would have said the very air was non-existent, that the warm, soothing light, alone, filled the room with its blonde, impalpable substance. No doubt these feelings came over me on this particular occasion by way of contrast to the excitement and thrill of the pictures at which I had just been gazing.

From time to time mamma prompted me with the right word, and I related another incident. I asked: "Why is it always raining at the pictures?" At first mamma did not understand, but finally she guessed what I meant. She explained to papa that all the pictures shook and trembled. But things would improve in this respect, beyond a doubt. She also said that this invention was due to the Lumière brothers. She added that they were rightly named, and as she spoke there was in her face that tear of admiration always present when mention was made of trivial details concerning famous men: Jacquard, who invented the weaving-loom,

Pasteur or Victor Hugo, Rochefort of the "Lanterne", or the Prince Imperial. Such incidents (an anecdote, or, as in the present instance, a pun) brought these illustrious men nearer to her, made them more familiar; she would try to put herself in the place of their mother, and their fame and glory would move her considerably: all this was comprised in that tear: a mother's tear over the glorious future which she dreams for her own child.

Of all this I was dimly conscious; I wanted something: perhaps that glory for the sake of that tear. Why should not I be like the Lumière brothers? Why should not I, myself, some day, before theatre-filled crowds, create life-like series of the most wonderful pictures? This time I had a vision of a theatre less insignificant than a Punch-and-Judy show, of shadows less droll than Chinese shadows. A first faint glimmer of art and glory. Art, the shadow of life; art, more beautiful than life.

1920.

Chapter XIV

SAINT-NICOLAS

Every year, one night at the beginning of December, Saint-Nicolas, the patron saint of Lorraine, with flowing, white beard, mitre on head and crozier in hand, went along the roofs of the houses, accompanied by his ass laden with all kinds of good things ; the sound of the steps of both bishop and beast being drowned in the snow. A little behind, hobbling along as Justice, followed Père Fouettard, a very ugly, cross-grained old fellow, carrying rods. And according to the merits of each child, on the hearth-stones where stood the little shoes were silently deposited either the toys and sweets brought by the ass or the rods of Père Fouettard. For my part, I never had any dealings with the old croaker. If there actually were naughty children who deserved his rods, they appeared to me as creatures of another world into which I could never by any possibility fall ; I belonged to another species of being

altogether, and there could be no further discussion of the matter: something like what right-minded young ladies might think of heretics or fallen women. Consequently, there was never any anxiety in my mind when Saint-Nicolas Day drew near.

How did the good saint guess the very things I ardently desired? How came it that they were arranged so orderly if he threw them down from the top of the chimney, and, in case he came down to arrange them himself, how could he make himself small enough to descend? That could be explained by the fact that everything is possible to a saint. What puzzled me more was to find out how the ride on the roofs took place, for roofs are not all of the same height; besides, all the houses do not touch, and it could not be very convenient—either for the poor, heavily-burdened ass or for that old, bandy-legged Père Fouettard—to leap. Or am I to think that the power of the saint is shared by all—men and beasts—that come in contact with him? Probably.

No longer did I reason, I believed, and respectfully evoked the mystery of that night journey, of those snow-drowned steps that do not intend to be heard. And something in this evocation seemed to whisper: "Hush!" and put a finger on my mouth.

On the morning of the great day I awoke earlier than usual. Jumping out of bed, I ran to the chimney and looked: my shoes were brimming over, they had not been large enough, and various articles lay all around. Then I went down on to my knees close to the chimney, looked up, and shouted with all my might, for he must already be a long distance away: "Thank you, Saint-Nicolas!" This was my own idea, and every year afterwards my parents suggested that I should repeat the experiment. Then my mother dressed me. The lamp was lit on the dining-room table; it was very strange indeed, mysterious and solemn, to have the lamp lit as though it were night, whereas I was perfectly well aware throughout my body which was but half awake and still shivering after so

recently being in front of the fire that it was really morning. After this, I unfastened my parcels by lamp-light, in an atmosphere at once magical and incomprehensible; I saw wonder after wonder, and began to play with my new toys.

The lamp-light gradually paled, the light-grey December day began to dawn; papa read his paper, accompanying the many topics that did not interest him with his habitual remark: "Allez vous promener!" a sign that he did not intend to read that article. I had explored the whole of my newly-acquired wealth; I had become familiar with it and recognized its limitations, the result being that I was aware it had lost somewhat of its prestige and so was somewhat sad to discover that covetousness had been a finer thing than possession. This feeling I rejected, reproaching myself for my ingratitude. And yet, after all, it was nothing else: sweets that could be eaten, of which there would speedily be nothing left, and toys that could be handled like anything else, house-building games, the

various pieces of which could be counted, and with which you could certainly never build fairy castles.

I never, indeed, questioned the supernatural origin of Saint-Nicolas' gifts, material and commonplace though they were. I had great faith.

And when you have faith, you are impervious to reasons for doubting; you even change them into reasons for believing. One year, for instance, either one or two days before Saint-Nicolas, in the kitchen cupboard—which mamma had half-opened to look for some utensil or other—I had caught a glimpse of something red and white and shining, something quite unusual. I was already pointing at it—a gesture which must have been more spontaneous with me than language, for no doubt I was very small. Mamma, seeing what I wanted, quickly shut the cupboard, refused to open it, in spite of my insisting, and gave me very evasive answers regarding the red and white object. I am even inclined to think that she got rid of me by asserting that

Saint-Nicolas did not like children who were inquisitive and stubborn. At all events, I gave way, and assuredly Saint-Nicolas was not displeased with me, for he brought me a horse whose shining mane, strange to say, reminded me of a certain white I had already seen, whi'st the four feet were firmly planted on a strong board, the vivid red of which was not unknown to me. I remembered the forbidden vision of the cupboard, just as one suddenly, in broad daylight, may have a dim recollection of a dream in the night when brought in contact with some object which calls it forth. Still, I did not reach the point of identification ; still less would I have suspected my mother of having acted as a substitute for Saint-Nicolas. No, indeed ! I merely reflected that there were more things under heaven—and even under the ceiling—than were " dreamt of in my philosophy ". I felt uneasy, as though on the brink of a mystery, and this uneasiness —which I should have had considerable difficulty in expressing in words, even to

myself, and of which I informed nobody—instead of shattering my faith, actually confirmed it. It seemed to me as though I had had a sort of prophetic vision through the half-opened cupboard door, and that thinking too much of it or asking questions would have been a profanation of the mystery. Hush! There was something really mysterious in this; the whole house was permeated through and through with kitchen cupboards. Miraculous Saint-Nicolas!

Later on, at the age of six, when Saint-Nicolas came round, a slight doubt entered my mind, nothing more, and I had soon travestied it into a proof of my faith. At the dining-room table I was doing my lesson for the morrow. I had utilized the cubes of a puzzle for making a fence which fixed the boundaries of " my desk ". I was proud of this corner of the table, which I imagined was now raised in rank and importance; I admired my motley fence and kept rectifying and improving it: a task which occupied my attention rather

too much. I was feverish, my hand was hot and trembling, my handwriting an illegible scrawl ; the symptoms were suggestive of an attack of dry pleurisy, which actually declared itself the following day—the very pleurisy which my friend, Raymond Tout, had told me about, saying that I had a serious illness, so serious that he could not remember the name, except that it was " dry something ". It may be that this fever of mine had something to do with the sensation of burning in my recollections of that evening.

Then the handbell of Saint-Nicolas began to tinkle. I ran to the window of the " chambre-à-côté ", the one that overlooked the street. The transition from warm to cold made me shiver ; the window-pane was just beginning to be covered with hoar-frost. Mamma opened the window, and in the dim light of the already darkening street there could be seen advancing a swarming procession of urchins, boys and girls, many of them carrying torches. The group approached

noisily; I could now recognize Saint-Nicolas, his gold-spangled mitre and crozier shining dimly in the darkness. There was no ass to be seen. Père Fouettard laughed as he tinkled his bell; his uncouth person was wholly eclipsed by that of the Saint who calmly proceeded on his way with firm majestic steps, accompanied by his noisy band.

Now I could see him from head to foot, by the light of the street lamp opposite. I saw his white beard, and even made out his features. He actually seemed flesh and blood, like anyone else. Now, I had learnt in my catechism that the saints were dead: there was nothing of a ghost about this one, anyhow! I remarked to mamma, who had lifted me up into her arms: "After all, whoever would think he is dead!" Once more I admired the miraculous element in it all: how that soul, which has been in heaven for hundreds of years, was able every year to gather together all its old bones and stuff them in nice firm flesh—without counting his beard!

Lost in wonder, I no longer noticed the procession fading away in the darkness; until the tinkle of the bell brought me back to myself and I obtained a last glance, my eyes now moist with tears.

I was speedily to be undeceived, however; for, when I was seven years of age—we had been talking about the Easter bells which, the legend says, leave the church steeples, and scatter coloured eggs about the garden beds—a school friend brutally told me the truth. We were returning from school and were crossing the railway bridge, the one with the high railing which always remains associated with my first early steps along the path of reality, of disillusionment and life. Pierre Remiet was proud of his superior knowledge; he stood erect and elegant, carrying his head high and strutting about in a white silk neckerchief, though he did not appear to be quite at home in it. He did not blurt out his information all at once, but alluded to it in a way which made it even more uncomfortable for me.

He spoke as though I knew all about it, ridiculing youngsters simple-minded enough to believe still in these old wives' tales. Grieved to the heart, I nevertheless restrained myself, for I had too much self-love to allow him to imagine that I was one of these simpletons. I even carried my heroism to the point of laughing along with him: heroism which was both cowardice and a capitulation of conscience: as indeed is much of what passes for heroism in life. On returning home, I sat leaning on the marble window-sill overlooking the garden, the very window at which I had some time previously reflected upon the iron railing and had felt so melancholy. The same feeling of sadness again came over me. My elbow was crumpling up my precious papers, all my drawings and compositions, piles of which had been accumulating in this window corner, to the despair of Alexandrine, the housemaid, who, when dusting the room, was always raging against those "paterasses", as she called them. And each time I would

reprove her—conceited little pedant as I was—informing her that they were "paperasses", spelt with a P. This ignorant woman knew nothing at all, but I . . . how proud I was of my knowledge. And now . . . I had indeed something to be proud of! Pierre Remiet was proud too . . . But knowledge is a sorry thing, after all. I looked piteously at the motley heap of papers of all sizes, on which I had given form and expression to so many fancies and ideas. Now they all seemed devoid of meaning, and in my ill-temper I purposely plunged my elbow into their midst once more. Mamma asked me what was the matter. Tears were streaming down my cheeks. I told her what had happened, and asked her if the information I had received was really true. I still had a faint hope left.

But it was quite true. Then I concluded that what was true in the case of the bells was also true in that of the "petit Jesus" who came at Christmas and in that of Saint-Nicolas. Mamma nodded. Not for

a moment did I think of wondering at the lie she had so long kept up—she who, nevertheless, always told me the truth—still less did I think of being angry with her. I was too sad to be angry with anyone. Besides, I quite felt that the thing was inevitable, something that could not be helped. Such is life, and of course one could not always remain a child.

No matter, it *was* hard to disbelieve, especially in the matter of Saint-Nicolas. His legendary story plays so important a rôle in Lorraine; there it is so much alive! How clear the tinkling of the little bell in the December air! And there are so many incidents in the epic narrative about the Saint, so many fine tales, as entrancing as the mitre and the crozier! I even had a picture book—I saw it again in a dream the other night—in which the whole epic was given: the Saint with his ass and Père Fouettard, the sailors of Russia, all in blue, kneeling on the decks of their ships in adoration—for the patron saint of Lorraine is also the patron saint

of Russia, that unreal, fantastic land of light and snow—and finally the Ogre, who put in the salting-tub three little children that had lost their way: Saint-Nicolas, it appears, had asked the Ogre for shelter and hospitality, and as he was fond of pork, he had removed the lid of the salting-tub. There lay the children, all cut up into pieces in the brine, and, of course, he had brought them back to life again . . .

All this disappeared along with Saint-Nicolas. Still, I retained a strong feeling of love and affection for the blue and white lands of those entrancing legends, and I more or less identified these dreamlands with Russia. Later on, I was glad to learn that my own country had allied itself with Russia, and I felt considerable esteem for President Carnot, who brought about this alliance. It was at a still later date that I discovered that great magician. Leo Nicolaevich Tolstoi, the white-bearded Saint who lived in Russia, and the reason I at once became so fond of him is no doubt

because he brought back to life, out of the depths of my childhood's regrets, the slumbering Saint-Nicolas, to whose loss I had never become fully resigned. One must never resign oneself to feeling that the age of miracles is past : the world is swarming with miracles. The new Saint of Russia, though he had neither ass nor gifts that came down the chimney, as he tramped through the snow brought me treasures of another kind.

1918.

Chapter XV

THE DEVIL

I have seen him with my own eyes: now droll, now awful, but never solemn. Rather was he a malicious dwarf, a rascally, frolicsome child, who would trip you up and then run away, the rogue, leaving you with a cold shudder down your back.

Our home contained a dining-room, a bedroom, and between these two "la chambre-à-côté". This name came as readily to my tongue as those of the other two; it would certainly have astonished me to learn that there were houses without a "chambre-à-côté". It was a long room, with window-blinds frequently closed, and where the shade seemed motionless as stagnant water . . . a room unoccupied except when I led my ducks in procession through it, when we called it the drawing-room for mamma's receptions on Fridays, and again on Wednesdays, when the dressmaker was working in it, her sewing-

machine standing before the window, which then let in the light as at no time else. In other respects, there was a certain mystery about the " chambre-à-côté ". It was there that Saint-Nicolas gave me the surprise of his presents, just as a December night gave us the first snowflakes.

At night, the mystery became intensified. On winter evenings especially, when the small dining-room, speedily over-heated, became stifling in a very short time, as was explained by papa when telling us that the thermometer had risen to over 18 degrees Centigrade. Thereupon the door of the " chambre-à-côté " was half opened. The cold came in like an icy breath; the shade was on the point of entering too. And was not this chill funereal breath that of the steam rollers ? I could hear them panting behind the door left ajar. Sometimes I was sent to close the door a little more, or even to fetch something out of the room. A slight shiver of fear would come over me, though I was far too proud to show it. I went as though walking in

my sleep, stiff, and scarce daring to breathe, trying not to think and almost succeeding in doing so, and I hurried back to crouch down in the pleasant warmth and kindly companionship of those I had just left.

It was in the "chambre-à-côté" that I saw the devil in my dream: a good-natured devil at bottom, who went up and down without paying much attention to me. He was a little black creature, a devilkin, and had a tail: somewhat like a little dog trotting about on his hind legs. He toddled and tottered about, all over the room, returning and starting afresh without a moment's pause. Near the window were the dressmaker and her sewing-machine. This goblin was very frolicsome: round his neck was a little bell, which never ceased ringing. He amused, without reassuring.

He was like a toy: one that starts of itself and that you cannot control. Indeed, he must have been a sort of compound of several of my own playthings. I am thinking of a large cardboard doll, about

his own size, whose horrible grimace terrified other children and startled ladies, though I was very fond of it and liked to see the horror and fear it inspired. I also remember dolls which I had been taught to christen follies, dolls dressed somewhat to resemble kings' jesters, and like them wearing a preposterous fools' cap with the ends bending beneath the slight weight of a tiny bell. Though I was fond of dolls, I did not love them as little girls do. I played — quite dispassionately — with these baby dolls, all alike and expressionless, for which, if need be, you may substitute a few pieces of cloth bundled together, seeing that their only purpose is to let themselves be lulled to sleep or cuddled in one's arms. What I preferred was picturesque characters, nor did I detest the grotesque, if sufficiently amazing or frightful. My devilkin with the bell reminded me of a team of frisky horses, with tiny bells on their necks, which, at the age of three, I conducted along the footpaths of the less-frequented streets. My team

seemed to me something enormous : people turned aside to make way and then looked back to admire it. I, a little Phaeton, proud of my initial efforts, drove along my steeds which, I think, bent round each curve of the road and pranced in elegant fashion, like a little greyhound standing on its hind legs. And the bells tinkled and made high festival.

I have had other dreams in which the Devil would assume another form. On the railway bridge—that unlucky spot, the scene of unpleasant discoveries—I met an elegantly dressed man with the head of a black cat or of a wolf—Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding Hood's wolf. Then again, the Devil-wolf appeared in the epic—so dear to me—of Saint Antony and his pig. Do you know the tale ? One day, when Saint Antony was returning to his cavern, he saw in the dark shadow near the hearth a pair of fiery eyes which he thought he recognized. (O ! the thrill of dread, the sort of fear you love, when you read of those eyes shining through the blackness of

the night!) The Devil in the shape of a wolf was seated on the potatoes which were all defiled and polluted. It was his object to induce the patient Saint Antony to swear and blaspheme. The potatoes were all black and the Saint was sadly weighing them in his hand when his friend the pig came and sniffed them, tasted them and enjoyed a hearty meal, as did also the Saint himself. The sulphurous emanations of the Devil had made the potatoes quite black, converting them into truffles.

The whole of the mock-heroic drama dealing with the temptations of Saint Antony was played every year, with marionnettes, in the booths of the fair. The Devil would gesticulate violently with his devilkins, but in the end he got the worst of it. In a golden shower that dazzled my eyes, the brown monk and his rose-coloured pig ascended and entered the open gates of Heaven: this was called the apotheosis.

Though I was anything but a Saint Antony, the devil would prowl about my childhood also: a being of many forms, two

fiery eyes at the entrance of a dream-forest, a tinkling bell heard in a nightmare. And the disturbing dream continued throughout the night into the day, gliding in and about every form of life.

Once I saw a very disturbing picture of a devil. It had been given to me, after mysterious explanations, in a dark, little ancient-looking shop without any front, mouldering in the shade beneath the lofty architecture of the Stanislas gate. I was with mamma, who would often step in to buy me some honey chocolate, the soft kind that melts in your mouth and blackens your fingers. The picture represented a terr fied child. What caused his fright ? At night the picture was held up in front of the lamp, and the problem was solved, both literally and figuratively : there was visible a transparent black devil pursuing the child with hooked claws.

The occasion, however, on which the Devil frightened me most was when I saw him in flesh and blood leap upon me in broad daylight. I was out in the town with

mamma, lingering before the shop windows. It was a street corner. This particular window seemed empty, perhaps it was being cleaned out. Suddenly, in less time than it takes to tell, a black figure came out of the darkness of the shop, and, at a bound, sprang right in my face, with the glass between us. Recoiling in horror, I ran up to mamma and crouched to her side. At first I dared not confess my fear, but she noticed it and questioned me. Then I explained that I had seen a little girl with devil's head, holding her head in hands that had fingers like horns. Mamma tried to soothe me by suggesting that it was a mask ; though I was only half convinced. As at the time when I had the prophetic vision of the present—given to me by Saint-Nicolas—at the farther end of the cupboard, so now the disturbing sense of the marvellous, the awful mystery of church and legend, came bursting into the real world of everyday life. I knew that cupboard, that street corner, as well as I knew the ceiling of the room in which I slept. These

were things as reassuring as the members of one's own family. Then, of a sudden, they become less reassuring; they are anything but reassuring: especially that street corner of which I had long been afraid.

In very truth the Devil keeps watch at street-corners. And his metamorphoses are so deceptive! A dog or a wolf on its hind legs, a prancing horse, a puss-in-boots. This manifold vision of the human beast, the beast that suddenly resembles a man and shows us, in caricature or in nightmare, the disturbing and bestial side of our own nature: *that* is the Devil; and the child, though he does not understand, feels that he is being watched and waited for by him.

What metamorphoses! Long afterwards, at the age of fifteen (perhaps it was the effect of that railway bridge, a spot haunted by the vague and uncertain emotions of my childhood), I was actually afraid, as though she had been the Devil himself, of a girl I happened to meet every morning. She was going to the High

School and I to my own school. We exchanged glances, but I did not see her, for my sight became blurred as soon as I perceived her approaching at the other side of the bridge. She passed in a flickering mist. I could not distinguish her face, and saw nothing more than the supernatural glow, as through liquid fire, of two long eyes swimming towards me. I felt myself blush to the roots of my hair. When it chanced to rain, I concealed my face under my umbrella and passed boldly along. But then, . . . it does not rain every day. I made arrangements to pass a few minutes earlier, the result being that I met her farther away ; . . . to pass later, but she waited for me. This was becoming serious. I was compelled to go by another street.

1918.

Chapter XVI

VISIONS AND VOICES

The team of horses, with tiny bells tinkling at their necks, . . . a memory evoked by these reflections on the Devil . . . reminds me of another encounter with the mysterious.

I was ill and in bed . . . the big bed. It was broad daylight, and I had the feeling that I was wide awake, when suddenly a lively tinkling of bells was heard in the " chambre-à-côté ". It comes nearer, and through the door there bursts into the room a tiny carriage and pair all shining like silver, with cracking of whips and jingling of wheels . . . a delight to eye and ear alike. It glides like a sledge over the polished floor, turns and winds about and disappears the same way it came, whilst the laughter of the bells grows fainter and fainter until it dies away in the distance. Scarcely had I time to see all this and to remember where I was. I sat up and

leaned over the edge of the bed to follow this vision until it disappeared.

Papa and mamma came into the room with something hot for me to drink, either some broth or beaten-up milk-and-egg. I asked for news of the carriage and pair. They told me I had been dreaming; I repudiated the idea. Then they said I was delirious. I did not know what the word meant. They felt my pulse to see if I was feverish. I saw them exchange serious and uneasy glances. I was anything but sorry to be the object of all this anxiety . . . although not too certain myself about that dream in broad daylight.

Another time I was in the same bed. The clear morning light was flooding the room. The sun was not shining into it, but the diffused light dazzled me as I awoke. The graceful patterns of the painted wall-paper—which had stood there for a score of years—were almost effaced, leaving the walls all the lighter, stained above each bed by the discoloration which the heavy breathing of my sleeping father

and mother produced night after night. I stretched myself in a veritable bath of light.

Then voices spoke to me . . . voices from ceiling and air, walls and corners . . . and yet I saw no one. There appeared to be two voices which uttered isolated words: probably my name and two or three other words. There was something immaterial about these sounds, as though their vibrations did not come through the real air. Had not the voices been soft and gentle, this would have frightened me; they must have come from heaven. The next few days, I heard some feeble echoes, then nothing at all. In vain did I call to them and listen attentively, for though I dreaded them, they exercised a subtle fascination over me.

I would not speak about my voices, and, from a feeling of shame, jealously kept my secret to myself. I was afraid that others would treat these serious matters as a careless jest, or would again say that I had been delirious, whereas I was certain I had heard aright. I did

not understand, but what did that matter ? There are so many things in life that one does not understand. I did not even exert myself to explain, to form suppositions. Involuntarily, however, I vaguely connected these voices with the sacred objects hanging above my bed : first, a souvenir of my mother's first communion : a picture I but vaguely understood and which I should have liked to see at close quarters, though I was compelled to interpret its details in my own way, as one builds up a novel from some face of which one has caught but a glimpse. Then came a holy-water receiver, empty and invariably dusty, for there were recesses and corners all over it. On either side were vividly coloured pictures, painted on marble and framed in white marble, there were loud-coloured ikons from the Rhine district, representing Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary, and had come from my grandmother on my father's side. Also two medallions, dedicated to these two saints, though the ivory or horn figures were

in relief and as white and pale-looking as the others were over-coloured. These came from my mother's family. At one time I called the Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary papa and mamma. I explained that the " little child " was in the arms of his brilliantly coloured mamma, but in the case of the white mamma, the little child was not there.

These characters were blended with my recollection of the two voices . . . Perhaps these were the two voices I have often heard since, fighting within me : the one delicate and pure, half bourgeois and half aristocratic, belonging to my mother's family : the other spirited, wild, and passionate, springing from the people, to which my father belonged.

1918.

Chapter XVII

CRINOLINES

I followed mamma into the lumber-room. "Lumber-room" was the term of abuse we gave to the loft, the garret, in which the dust silently shrouded the museum of our family archæology. Old rubbish in the utmost disorder was piled upon old furniture that could no longer be used. Especially were there damaged cardboard boxes containing silks and satins, ribbons and embroidery. In the previous century, the chief industry of our town had been embroidered goods, which were famous for miles and miles around. My mother's parents had kept an embroidery shop, and for forty years the old boxes had been lying there, knocked about by three or four house removals which had left them stranded in this spot, poor battered boxes filled with old and neglected wonders now doomed to prolonged oblivion: old-time embroideries, labours of Penelope, that

had been perfected without haste or precipitancy and fondly caressed by the dainty artistic hands of country maidens.

Mamma disturbed the accumulated dust as she turned over the buried piles of goods. She was trying to unearth something with which I could play, or even . . . a less frequent joy . . . shot silks or plush, velvet or velveteen, farandine or satin, for making me a fancy dress or a disguise. In that case, the rummage was quite a lengthy process, far too long to please me, and I would dance about in all the excitement of impatience and the desire to see my costume started; to guess, at least, what it would be like, though my mother herself did not yet know, but sought inspiration in the outcome of her discoveries.

How many boxes seemed to be veritable horns of plenty, as they exhibited their variegated wealth—which roused in me a spirit of covetousness—on some worm-eaten table all covered with dust which my mother wiped away with the corner of her apron! Then, her fingers hesitating and

lingering over them with evident regret, she would return each article, one by one, for further years of jealous custody. With what hopes my astonished eyes danced and sparkled . . . hopes speedily disappointed, alas! Fur trimmings appeared before my gaze, tucks were smoothed out straight, then everything was put back into its wonted tomb. Every time my mother went up to the lumber-room, she heaved a sigh at the state of hopeless disorder she found there, and lamented that she was "too conservative". That did not help matters, however, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she made up her mind to sacrifice a single ribbon. The older the things were, the more she stuck to them. She would unfold them, stroke them lovingly as she thought of the memories they evoked, and then put them back again with the excuse: "That may come in useful." Indeed, these chiffons were too reminiscent of the past; they were too living and sacred for her. Though quite aware they could never be used, still

she would have an opportunity of stroking and caressing them again some day. They had a history of their own, one which she murmured to herself and to which I listened, as to a legend. These once belonged to Aunt Pauline; those to Aunt Caroline. Ah! how pitiful sounded these poor old names whose ghosts seemed to steal silently over this waste and ruin. In the long run, I myself suffered from contact with their pallid bloodless forms. Nor did I know exactly whether it was the stifling air of the garret and the musty smell of all these imprisoned objects, or the presence of the spirit of these old folk, the very soul of bygone times, that made me feel weak and drained the very life out of me.

It was only after a large number of boxes had been mysteriously, almost timorously, opened, and piously shut, that a plan of disguise began to assume form. I remember once being dressed up by my mother as a Spanish mandoline player in a dark green velvet bolero. On another occasion I assumed the character of a lady in bygone

times wearing a crinoline. A brown and green dress, with changing effects, like imitation bronze, was puffed out in toy balloons around my waist on a whalebone framework. I strutted about and made sweeping bows. It was neither for a fête nor for a children's ball that I was decked out in this fashion ; simply for my parents and myself, with perhaps a few neighbours. My mother liked to see me wearing a costume which had been her own as a little girl.

Another fancy dress, in the more distant past, was that of myself as an Alsatian girl. They had also dressed up a little girl, Jeanne Bourion, of about my own age, who lived just opposite. How old was I then ? Four years, I think. I could not have started going to school, for I was still at an age when one child does not feel too safe in the presence of another child it does not know. Jeanne was as timid as myself. Though our mothers were on speaking terms, we children only knew each other by sight. We took hands, she was on my left, and we cast sidelong glances at each

other in mingled fear and wonder. She was dark-complexioned, almost black, a thing that puzzled me greatly; never before had I been so near to anyone as black as she was. The result was that we went along the path together without a word, without daring to speak. It was she who acted as guide. We had been sent to her father, who worked in an office, a little beyond the turn at the end of the street. He had not recognized—or had pretended not to recognize—this other little girl who was coming along with his own, and for some considerable time I enjoyed the pleasure of playing this trick on him. For the moment, however, while in the street holding Jeanne by the hand, though my vague dread had passed, I felt somewhat ill at ease. It was a feeling I many a time experienced in childhood when I had to play with children I did not know well, especially when mamma left us alone together. Then I was immediately out of my depth, I did not know what to say, and everything was a blank.

From time to time I would mount to the lumber-room with mamma. There, in the vaulted garret and amid those old associations, the same sensation of being cramped and suffocated always blended with my pleasure. As I grew up, this sensation became more complex, it changed into a vague, dim feeling, an ill-defined thought. The lumber-room was the embodiment of my mother's childhood and youth, of her parents and relatives, Aunt Caroline and Aunt Pauline. I was aware that Aunt Pauline had brought up my mother—who had been left an orphan—very strictly and correctly. The very thought stifled me and I began to feel a certain resentment against my mother for so placidly submitting to be labelled as belonging to the bourgeois, as having come down in life. For my part, I should have found it very boring and stupidly tyrannical! . . . This somewhat narrow-minded spirit was inherent in my mother's family; and so I did my best to respect it and to show due reverence for the aunts I had never known, whose

memory my mother venerated as she handled these relics of the past. But, deep in my heart, how tiresome I thought they were! Those cardboard boxes, those yellow bits of lace, that had a sort of conscientious and crabbed look about them, that odour of mouldy dust and bygone memories one was forced to breathe: all these things represented to me the obsolete spirit of my two aunts. The papers, stained with the blight of time, the fading silks and satins with their little old-pink patterns, were like the muffled-up, freckled faces of orphan schoolgirls, which my mother's face had inherited from her family: some of it had descended to me, a fact which humiliated me greatly. At the same time I began to notice in my mother, and occasionally in myself, the presence of a sort of canker, left in the soul by the poor and shrivelled spirit, so proper and provincial, of these old aunts and their ancestors. And that element of wild independence inherited from my father's strong, passionate nature, began secretly to rebel

against the child being too much subjected to this old-time influence, the child too good and quiet that I was . . . I who was not myself at all.

Caroline and crinolines . . . old names and old things! Travesties of bygone years, relics in which my mother enveloped me; my soul, travestied as that of a pallid obedient little girl, and which mamma had unfittingly fashioned thus and I myself had accepted so that I might cling the closer to her; fragile laces and ribbons handled with religious care; respect for old times and departed aunts; the provincial elegance of fallen nobility: the old-world femininity of my infant soul: Caroline and crinolines . . . old names and old things, your days had now become numbered. My father rebelled within me against my mother, my new-born manhood began to rear and prance. I did not understand: neither did my parents. I did not even know. Gusts of discontent came over me, but I reproached myself that this should happen, just as my mother would

have done. The drama was being enacted in the silence : outwardly I remained a quiet submissive child. Up to the age of twenty I was known as such to my mother ; like all mothers she cherished the illusion that she knew her child.

1918.

Chapter XVIII

MY FIRST CLASS

The parents of certain children, long before the little ones go to school, create in them a sort of nightmare dread of it, so that they look upon the place as a big, dark room into which they will be placed if they are not good. For my part, I had been induced to regard school as a reward. I looked forward to it impatiently and went joyfully when the time came.

It was the fifth of October. During the whole of my childhood I had an almost superstitious reverence for important dates and memorable events ; I lived over again that form of religion which gave birth, as the centuries rolled along, to fêtes and anniversaries ; the consequence was that I piously remembered this date along with the rest. And so my mother accompanied me to school, the summer holidays being over. I was five years old. I do not remember if the chilly autumn weather had

begun to make itself felt: I was far too preoccupied with my feelings of happiness to attend to such things.

I have a very clear vision, distinctly projected on to a vague background, of the exact moment when my joy reached its height and I was perhaps happier than I had ever been before. It was when we had just turned the corner of the little steep and dark street, the Rue Blondlot—a name that still means so much to me—the street leading to the entrance of the infant school. I do not remember what had happened before, how we had got there; I only know we had just turned the corner. My mother was holding me by the hand; she must have been wearing her rain cloak, which was waterproof and light, smooth and black, and as it became swollen with wind, I compared mamma to the balloon they released every Fourteenth of July on the Place Stanislas.

As we turned the corner, I must certainly have been aware that we had reached our destination; I recognized the building, the

basement windows from which issued the smell and smoke of cooking. The brown door was approached by a number of steps which appeared to me as steep and solemn as those of an altar. As a matter of fact, my father and I had been there a few days before, for the purpose of enrolling my name. On that occasion, my father had rapped violently at the brown door, and had even made use of his stick. The door was opened, and the explanation given that this was not the entrance; all the same we were invited to come in, and I then saw for the first time the short wide staircase, with a smooth iron rail down the middle—kept smooth, by the way, because the boys were in the habit of sliding down it—and along which you pass to the corridors and classrooms. Some one who was addressed with considerable respect had pointed out which was to be my classroom. I had been impressed by the great empty courts, lined like a cloister with echoing passages. (The building was originally an ancient convent belonging to the Order of the Visitation,

and the superadded buildings had been constructed along similar lines, though they were somewhat wider and better ventilated. The whole building struck me not as something sad and desolate, but as something large and mysterious : an aspect of things which gave me a faint impression of the new and serious life upon which I was about to enter.

Now I recognized where I was. It may be that my mother had slightly prepared me for what was to happen, long before we turned the corner of the street. From that moment, however, I leapt with joy. And I remember pulling my mother's hand to induce her to move faster. I have an impression that she could not keep up with me, so impetuous was I. She smiled, and, making some remark or other which roused my enthusiasm, kept my spirits aglow all the time. The brown door drew me like a magnet, made me walk on air, would have torn me from my mother's grasp ; my wrist was actually sore, for she insisted on holding me. (In the same

way did I drag along my mother, though she checked me again, as she had done on the day I first saw the electric tram.)

* * * *

I spent a few moments only in the lowest class of all, that of Mademoiselle Rohr. Seeing that my mother had already taught me spelling, I was at once moved into the next class, which was taught by Madame Pierron.

This new class, larger and more serious than the first, quiet and correct, taught by a mistress who was more strict and dignified, made me feel extremely proud of myself. I was also a little uneasy: the fact of having been promoted a class, after tergiversations of which I was conscious of being the object, made me feel that I was an individual apart, one who did not fit into the ordinary categories.

The forms were arranged tier upon tier, like a theatre, and I was right at the top. I looked down upon the dark mass of small boys, most of them wearing the traditional black apron. My eyes were fixed on the mistress, all alone on the platform, her

white dress shining as though she were before the footlights. She was speaking in solemn, arresting tones, and we all listened eagerly, though understanding nothing: just as in the theatre you go through the first few scenes before your ears become accustomed to the timbre of the actors' voices, while you in the meantime are endeavouring to pick up the thread of the plot which at that stage is of a more or less puzzling nature. We knew we had to listen, and that something of importance was being said, and so we listened at first with an earnestness equal to that exhibited by the mistress herself.

I was on a form with two seats, I think, another boy being on my right. Behind, was the wall, or two or three other forms at most. It was the first time I had had a companion, a little boy like myself, to whom I could talk. If I remember aright, he must have been the prefect's son, a handsome child whose blonde curls fell back on to his shoulders. His name was Joucla-Pelouse, a name as curly and blonde as his hair. When we got tired of the

monologue that was taking place on the platform, we began to look around, to sum one another up, to point out things and speak to our neighbours. Madame Pierron called us to attention, and—wonder of wonders !—she actually knew our names : a thing which inspired in me the utmost respect for her. Nevertheless my little neighbour would not let himself be put about for such a trifle, and he continued talking. This troubled me considerably. I was torn between the desire to speak to him and the fear of disobeying a lady who knew both my Christian name and my family name, who knew everything as well as God himself, and must, like Him, be practically omnipotent. In the end, they had to separate me from my companion and give me a quieter one. The eyes of the whole class were turned in our direction : an incident which made me feel more uneasy than ever and confirmed me in the consciousness that, amongst all those children, I was a being apart, one to whom things happen that do not happen to other boys.

1917.

Chapter XIX

IN WHICH I DISTINGUISH MYSELF

This impression that I was not like anyone else subsequently became intensified. So far, I do not think there was any pride connected with the feeling; it was one mainly of bashfulness and embarrassment. Having been brought up alone all my life, I did not feel quite at ease when in the company of my schoolmates. They made allusions to hosts of things into which I had not been initiated; to me, their language was almost foreign. It may be that I was too proud to ask for an explanation, and that a touch of vanity might have shown itself; anyhow, I could not join in their interests, and but slightly in their games.

One day Madame Pierron informed us that she was about to take us to the bakehouse: we should see how bread was made. I did not understand very well; in class I never understood very well; I felt

as though I were always at the theatre, looking down on the stage at actors whose words I could not make out clearly. I was not aware that the bakehouse was in the school basement—a fact I should have known had I been in the habit of conversing with the boarders. My imagination pictured a whole band of children traversing streets through which we had never passed. After all, did I even know who Madame Pierron was ? From her platform, she always spoke to us as though she were playing a part. But did I know who she was . . . herself ? You do not go with anyone in that offhand way. Mamma has always told me one must never allow oneself to be taken about by people one does not know. And yet . . . mamma always told me I must obey Madame Pierron. How am I to solve the dilemma ?

In the meantime the little company had risen and left the room. Greatly distressed, I followed. I continued to debate within myself : of course I must obey *her* in school ; but if *she* takes us out, that is not

play ; nor is it lessons ; she has no right to do it ; I refuse to obey . . . Now she is arranging us two by two in the passage : impossible to escape. I glanced desperately all around, hoping to find that some of my companions would look as perplexed as myself and that we might arrange together what to do for the best. But I looked in vain ! How cruel is the world's indifference to our own troubles ! They were all talking to one another, seemingly quite contented. They laughed and turned to the one behind, touching the back of the boy in front to get him to turn round also : that which tortured me seemed the very thing that gave them joy. They spoke of the oven and the baker and the hotcakes ; already they were licking their lips and their eyes shone in anticipation, as though reflecting the embers under the oven.

My remedy, after all, was to come from the evil itself. There is no single mental condition that does not express itself externally. If I were not like the rest internally, I was inevitably bound to betray myself by

my strange manner. And, indeed, when we were lined up, Madame Pierron was horrified to find that I looked like a duck among a brood of chickens. I was wearing something that had to be changed, for the sake of discipline and symmetry: she ordered me to run back into the classroom and put myself right, and then catch up the rest. I believe it was simply a matter of removing my cap: thinking that we were to go through the streets, I must have been the only one who had put it on his head.

I ran back to the classroom. Finding myself alone in that big empty place, I felt immensely relieved. Think of it; just when I least expected it, when I could see no escape and despaired of ever finding one, Madame Pierron herself had actually sent me back to that room I know so well, where I had nothing to fear and where no one could scold me, seeing that it was empty! It was indeed a miracle. Perhaps God had had pity on me and put it into the heart of Madame Pierron to send me back. Less and less did I under-

stand. However, I now no longer thought of rejoining my companions, but sat down in my place, and felt my heart beating more regularly as the steps of my schoolfellows died away on the stone flags along the passage.

I was alone for a considerable time. The idea of amusing myself by walking about never came into my head; no, I knew that in class one must sit quietly in one's place. Though there was no one to enforce obedience, I should never have permitted myself to violate this unwritten law. I remained then in my seat, and, as usually happens in the case of children left alone, inner reflections after a short time find expression in spoken words. Thereupon solemn voices which I did not know began to address me; they came from every corner of the room, and yet there was no one there. These voices seemed to reprove and chide me, and I began to suffer from remorse. Was this the voice of conscience? No doubt I have done wrong, and before long Madame Pierron

will punish me . . . On recognizing that these voices seemed merely to prolong my own words, echoed back from the other end of the room, I felt somewhat reassured. All the same, time dragged along, and the prospect of punishment was ever present in my mind.

I found pleasure in speaking out aloud, to awaken the echo, thus procuring for myself a delightful little thrill of fear. I bemoaned my lot, and the walls, more charitable than human beings, sympathized with me in my distress. Dwelling on my solitude, I said aloud: "Yes, they have all gone, even naughty Pâris." There must have been some unusually grave reason for thus blaming my schoolfellow, seeing that these last few words, flung back by the echo, gave me special pleasure. Again I repeated them aloud: "even naughty Pâris," and the walls now seemed to scold him in his turn and so to give me my revenge.

Some one, a senior boy, or perhaps the door-keeper who came to check the names

of absentees, entered. I was afraid of being caught, but on seeing me he made some joke or other intimating that he regarded me as already undergoing punishment. I summed him up as stupid: he did not know whether I was being punished or not, when as a matter of fact I was not! . . . Thereupon, he left me alone, and I resumed the thread of my reflections.

At last I heard the steps of the returning children. The moment had arrived for me to pay the penalty. Madame Pierron was the first to enter. She was amazed to find me there, and questioned me sternly:

"Madame," I stammered, "it was because I had not asked mamma's permission to go. . . ."

She tried to keep a stern, forbidding face, but I saw a smile beginning to appear, and then I knew she would not have the heart to scold me.

Chapter XX

BESIDE THE QUESTION

I never could understand very well.

One day, I had been chattering more than usual with my neighbour, Pierre Martin, the boy who for years was my inseparable companion. In spite of two or three rebukes, Pierre continued worse than ever, and I, though slightly disturbed at the idea that we were doing wrong, had not the heart to discontinue answering him. It was dark in our corner, I remember . . . perhaps on that account we felt more free from notice. All the same, Madame Pierron had evidently made up her mind to be strict, and so she "called us out". Right in front of the class, with back turned to the boys and facing the wall, Pierre Martin on the left of the blackboard and I on the right, we had to stand still in one place for quite a long time.

Often had I seen one or another of my companions "called out". For my own

part, however, I was certain no such thing could happen to me. It was something that did not interest me ; I had never even seriously asked what it meant. Now that I was "called out" myself, I was quite amazed at the situation in which I found myself. It was so improbable that I could not believe it. And yet my feelings were almost beginning to get the better of me, for I was dimly conscious that this must be some sort of punishment, . . . and my mother was in the habit of proudly informing her lady visitors that I had never once been punished ! I began to look sidewise at Pierre Martin ; as it happened he was engaged in the same occupation. He was smiling, and apparently making light of the whole thing. I too smiled—though it was a miserable failure—for I did not want him to think I was taking the affair more tragically than he was himself. Besides, after all, how did I know it was a punishment ? Perhaps it was a reward . . . Of course, it must be a distinction to be there, in front of all the others, like a drummer at

the head of a regiment of soldiers . . . I was aware that it *might* also be a punishment, though *she* had not said that she was punishing me. Well then ? . . . Again, there was nothing tiresome about it. In the first place, I had a companion, the one I liked best ; and in the second place, if we glanced aside, we could see Madame Pierron behind her desk. We saw how she was seated, how she leaned against the back of her chair, how she bent forward and made the chair creak, how she moved her feet and her dress under the desk : none of which things the others could see. From the class, you saw only her head, her bodice, and her hands writing down marks ; the desk, closed in front, and open only at the back, concealed more than half her person. Mysteries were now revealed, we saw at close quarters the movement of her lips when she spoke ; we saw at work that occult power which evolved tasks, lessons, good or bad conduct marks. We were initiates, the rest were the profane.

In brief, so completely did I persuade

myself that I was being honoured, that I came to believe it. Not altogether, however! At the back of my mind was a faint suspicion of the real state of things, and from time to time I still felt heavy at heart. What I dreaded most, in case I really were being punished, was the fact that it was my duty to tell mamma about it—for she had made me promise to tell her, and the idea of shirking such an obligation would never have entered my head . . . But of course I was not being punished.

When class was over, I might have discovered the truth from Pierre Martin, by asking him what exactly this "calling out" business meant, had I not been ashamed of seeming to know less than he did. He spoke of it as something with which he was quite familiar, like his home-work or lessons, his ruler or his pen-holder; certainly he would think me very stupid not to know this. Besides, in very truth, deep within my soul I was too much afraid of being undeceived and discovering that a punishment was intended. I preferred

not to say anything. After all, it must be a distinction ; was he not making a jest of it all !

My mother—I had to tell her everything—was informed that Madame Pierron had " made me come close up to her ". It was impossible to get anything from me beyond this ambiguous formula. Above all, I took good care not to mention the expression : " calling out," justifying my action to myself with some such reasoning as this : " What's the use of speaking about being ' called out ' " ? *I* don't know what it was for, and mamma, who is quite ignorant of school matters and does not even know that Cric is the door-keeper—mamma, who has to have everything explained to her, would certainly not understand.

My mother, however, made inquiries from Madame Pierron, and asked me how it was that I had not spoken of my punishment to her :

" I did not know that it was a punishment ! "

Was I sincere or not in this reply? It is very difficult to say: probably I was both.

* * * *

Another time, we had a "lesson in things", set as a composition. I was perfectly well aware that bread is made of wheat, wine of grapes, and beer of barley and hops. Mamma had heard me go over the lesson the previous night as we were walking along the Champigneulles road . . . by the way, I was very fond of counting the hectometer and kilometer-stones.

Madame Pierron wrote on the blackboard: "Bread is made of . . .; wine is made of . . .; beer is made of . . . and . . ." We had to copy this out and fill in the spaces. I contented myself with ruling straight lines all down a fine, big sheet of writing-paper, and reproducing, without omitting a single one, all the full stops marked on the blackboard. I can still see those admirable lines of points, of which I was very proud.

On the morrow, Madame Pierron looked at me in amazement, and asked me if I did not know.

" Did not know what ? "

" What bread is made of."

" Of course I know."

And I gave the correct answer. Then she asked me why I had not written it down.

Once again I had not thoroughly understood.

With a pencil, Madame Pierron filled in the blanks on my copy, and at the end of the year I obtained a prize for " lessons in things ".

1917.

Chapter XXI

THE SCHOOL BAG

Every July, when the school year came to an end, I was afraid of the higher class into which I was to go the following term. Though I was generally somewhere near the head of my class, I did not seem to realize that I should have the same boys with me and be able to keep my position without any difficulty. It appeared as though my lot was to be cast in with the big boys this year, the ones who were in the habit of challenging us and giving proof of their strength at our expense—though not at mine, for I did not fight. And, as a matter of fact, there are always some of these big fellows who continue a second year in the same class. Especially was I afraid of two or three of the roughest. At a leap they would be astride the little wall, breast-high, which separated the passage from the playground. Their legs, bare up to above the knees, with their

strong, solid calves, their short, tight breeches: all this made me afraid. It was not so much the fear of blows, as the fear of *the thing in itself*: these vigorous, firm legs on which the blue cloth seemed actually to be plastered or moulded, that impudent, shameless flesh, that growing manhood. Fear mingled with vague disgust; fear of growing up and having to become a man. Fear also of being pushed about, made fun of and scorned: I, who stood for intellect, by those who stood for brute force.

When I analyse my feeling, it seems to have been quite as much the fear of my own muscles as of theirs; I was timid and hesitating in my actions and movements, as well as ashamed of my own person. Never could I have jumped astride the wall as they did; something checked me on the point of leaping and made me swerve aside. Then I imagfned myself to be conspicuously awkward, and this but increased my embarrassment. The result was that I could not leap at all . . . I had to remain at the foot of the wall—that wall which separated

the child from the "little man". And I never was a "little man".

In the gymnasium, I was a sorry object. Faultless in going through the rhythmical movements of rational gymnastics, which the other children detested and shirked, I stood trembling and miserable near the various mechanical appliances on which they delighted to exhibit their prowess. Whether I had to climb up a rope, take a high jump, or whirl round the fixed bar, there was always the same fear, the same awkwardness, the same shrinking. The master, a fire brigade captain, acknowledged my willingness to try, but he evidently regarded me as a failure from his point of view.

All my recollections in this connexion centred round the episode of the school bag. On leaving Madame Pierron's infant class, at the age of six, to go up into the tenth class, where there was a master, M. Antoine, my father bought me a school bag for my books. Naturally, I was proud of it. But then . . . a soldier's bag carried on the

back, a class taught by a man instead of a woman,—rather too vividly, I imagine, did these represent that manhood, that virility, of which I was both ashamed and afraid, though I could not well explain why it was so. My bag caused me the same kind of annoyance as did the gymnasium; when school was over, I could manage to put my left arm through the strap, but on the right side it had to be fastened behind, under the armpit, and I could never find the right place. The rest already had their bags on their backs; I worried myself and jerked about, growing red in the face. I felt my hand getting moist and slipping over the smooth, iron buckle, which clicked as it struck against the clasp, but would not fasten. M. Antoine became sarcastic and impatient, and, as I was unaccustomed to rough treatment, it hurt me considerably to have anyone speak to me more loudly than was necessary; his words seemed to cut into my very flesh. Pierre Martin was a good-natured fellow and came to the rescue. He got into the habit of helping

me, and I left the whole thing to him. All the same, one should never rely too much even on one's best friends. He was fond of me, but he was also fond of marbles, and when school was over, he would sometimes be mentally engaged in adding up the number of marbles he wished to exchange with his playmates, then he would discuss the matter with them, and forget all about me. I watched him ; he did not look in my direction. He would laugh, shout or get angry. The task of carrying my bag now became a torture. Anxiously I wondered : " Will Pierre Martin remember me ? " I should have been ashamed to call him back. In the end, I mentioned the difficulty to mamma, and it was decided that I should carry my bag flung over my shoulder.

Fifteen years later, when in the regiment, I had forgotten all about this. And yet, it took me a long time to acquire the knack of fastening the belt of my knapsack under my right shoulder. All my annoyance in childhood had left its traces in me when I attained to man's estate. I was never

ready to pile up or take down arms at the signal, along with the rest, the result being that stinging words of reproach assailed my ears. And—shall I confess to my shame ? —it hurt me even then. Scratch the man ever so little, and you find the child.

1919.

Chapter XXII

MY LITTLE WARS

Assuredly I had no vocation for a soldier. During the whole of my childhood, I do not remember once having had a fight, in the real meaning of the word.

My father was advanced in years. After the midday meal, he indulged in a siesta in that dear old armchair, somewhat dismantled, with its many-coloured cover that I shall never forget. In spite of its disreputable appearance, my father preferred it, and refused to have it repaired lest he should not be able, in consequence, to enjoy his nap so well as before. Meanwhile, there must be no noise; I must play very quietly.

He died before I was twelve years of age. During the last three years of his life, he had several attacks of congestion and never fully recovered. The consequence was that at an age when boys, in their rough and tumble play, seem bent at every turn on

preparing to tread the path of life, I had to remain quiet and silent.

I saw lots of other children playing about in the street, but my mother had instilled it into me that children who play in the street are " petits voyous ", and the idea would never have entered my head to mix with *them*. They were the sort of children whom I set down as belonging to a different race from myself. They were regular barbarians. Their battles, which I sometimes watched from the window as I might have done a cock fight, seemed quite beyond my powers or capabilities. I did not feel that my legs were made to run—nor my fists and throat to strike and shriek—like theirs. It was a sight that rather affrighted me than otherwise. It was beyond my strength and at the same time despicable. Was there something of the " fox and grapes " attitude in the scorn I felt ? I should not dare to affirm the contrary, and yet, if I remember aright, these fights never roused a spirit of envy in me.

My first playmates had been of the

opposite sex. During my early years, my only companionship had been that of two little girls: Jeanne and afterwards Marie. I played at soldiers very little, though occasionally I would spend a few minutes with a doll. When at the age of five I entered school, my bent of mind was already determined.

Thenceforward boys were my companions. Nevertheless, their games and conversation, their ideas on things and people, above all their habit of disputing and cavilling about trifles: all this sufficed to convince me that they were far more stupid than little girls. Naturally, as I was judging them, I regarded myself as an exception. An incident I looked upon as pitiable in the extreme occurred when a handsome little fellow, with curly hair, wanted to have it cut off on the pretext that he looked like a girl. All the time I was growing, this feeling of respect for the feeble sex increased; not, truth to tell, because it was the feeble sex: there was nothing chivalrous—or even gallant—in the

sentiment. As a youth, gallantry . . . the hypocrisy of a man amusing a woman in order to conceal from her the fact that he esteems her inferior to himself . . . was repulsive to me. My feeling was genuine respect; I considered little girls to be endowed with finer qualities than boys.

At recreation time, I avoided such games as involved much running about or bodily encounter. I preferred a quiet chat with two or three others. Occasionally, I would join a group of young engineers, and with our heels we would dig, all over the playground in every direction, miniature canals for draining away the rain after a downpour. We were thoroughly convinced of the usefulness of our task, without for a moment suspecting that it was more profitable to the shoemaker than to anyone else.

At home, on Thursdays, when I was alone, I would sometimes play with lead soldiers. But it was not the soldiers that interested me most. I began by turning over the oilcloth on the table. The underside was green, and stood for fields and meadows.

Taking some white paper, I would cut out winding strips to represent roads and footpaths. Then I mobilized other toys; I built houses, sheepfolds and whole villages, distributing the flocks all over the meadows. Only then did I draw up my armies in battle array. Even so, I feel sure I preferred playing at drill to playing at war.

* * * *

It is not until my ninth year that we come to the only children's war in which I took an active part. As a soldier? No, indeed. As a general? More than that; I was president of the republic of Cravifie. In the eyes of my schoolmates, I was marked out for the rôle of commander-in-chief, partly, no doubt, because I was generally at the head of the class, perhaps also because, never having quarrelled with anyone, I had practically no enemies and so I could always count on a majority.

This choice appealed to my pride. From this time forward, I take my task seriously. I begin at once to organize the entire operations. I imagine the two camps as

representing two nations: ours being the republic of Cravifie. Our enemies, whose captain was Raymond Tout, I call Tosmans, a contradiction of Toutsmans, which, to my mind, signified the men of Tout (this was philological and very learned, and I was quite proud of it). Their country was the Empire of Tosmanie. I must add that, to my ear, "Tosmans" sounded a little like "Allemands" and it was anything but chance that led me to coin a word with a German root—were we not taught to regard the German as our hereditary enemy? This name "Tosmans", with its dull-sounding last syllable, also evoked in my mind something immense, a human steppe on the march like Attila's Huns, an ocean of fair-haired barbarians, as blond as Raymond Tout. "Cravifie," on the other hand, was something brown, like Pierre Martin, my prime minister; it sounded valiant and French, suggesting something slender and vigorous, irritable and quick-tempered.

These names meet with great success.

I appoint myself president of the republic, and, after choosing my ministers, we chalk the palaces of our capital on one of the schoolyard walls. As we cannot enter, we lean against them, at the risk of making our backs all white, and from there, without moving a step, we control operations. I decide in my own mind, and proclaim aloud, that Cravifie is quite a small country which will make it a point of honour to oppose a mighty empire, as the Boers opposed the English. Meanwhile, the Emperor of the Tosmans has set up his throne at the foot of a giant tree . . . like Saint-Louis dispensing justice in the pictures of our history books. On learning that we have marked out our frontiers on the gravel with our heels, and that we are leaving him the entire schoolground, retaining for ourselves only a few square feet in a dark corner, he makes up his mind that it is we, on the contrary, who are in possession of the schoolground, and the Tosmans who are the little nation of heroes. He traces round the tree a circle repre-

senting the bounds of the empire. We do not agree to this, and each group fortifies itself within its own frontiers, convinced that it alone retains the moral superiority inseparable from material inferiority. In short, we vie with one another in heroism. (After all, I seem to remember that it was we who were really the smaller army.)

Fighting begins, only to stop when the drum beats to announce the return to classrooms and we continue at the next recreation time. In both camps, we sincerely imagine that we are being attacked by the enemy. We all look upon our war as a " war of right and justice ". Sometimes the fighting becomes embittered, hand-to-hand encounters assume a dramatic turn. At these thrilling moments I gallop forward at the head of my troops. Such appearances, however, are short and few ; appropriate to the dignity of a commander-in-chief.

In the course of these raids it is but seldom that I am attacked. Should this happen, it is simply a matter of form, for

it is well known that I am not one of the combatants. Besides, no sooner am I assailed than two or three faithful body-guards rise up to defend me, and I always return unharmed to my chalked-in capital.

This war lasted for weeks—I was going to say months, and that may be quite true, but children are inclined to exaggerate. The main pleasure, to me, consisted in being at the head of things. My sense of satisfaction was the same as that I experienced in being the first of my class, though it was intensified by the excitement and heat of the game, above all, perhaps, by the excitement and heat of my fertile imagination.

There are certain children who delight in destroying. For my part, I could never bear to see a toy broken, a branch torn from a tree, or a harmless insect crushed under foot. On the other hand, I loved to create. In all our games in common, particularly in this war, it was one of my greatest joys to see my plans adopted by my companions and my yesterday's dreams carried

out to-day under my eyes. I long remained with my back against my palace—a wretched grey wall that stretched from the gymnasium to the lavatories, though imagination is vivid enough to transform anything into a palace !—and I never tired of looking down on the battle. It seemed as though each victorious raid sprang forth, ready armed, from myself, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Though my muscles were inactive, my imagination was having a glorious time.

On returning from school, sometimes alone, sometimes with my prime minister, Pierre Martin, Cravifie was now my sole preoccupation. I remember how seriously we discussed the question of the colour of our flag and with what earnestness we proposed to embroider on it these two lines of Jean Richepin, which I had discovered in my book of "Morceaux Choisis" and now repeated with the utmost fervour :

> Mieux vaut l'indépendance et l'incessant péril
> Que l'esclavage avec un éternel avril !

At home I would work out rough drafts

of laws for the republic. A general election happened to be taking place at the time, and the walls of the town were placarded with many-coloured insults. Our fathers spoke of nothing but the elections; naturally, we wanted to imitate them. I had made inquiries about the constitution of France, and I was determined to supply Cravifie with a better one. As might have been expected, the death penalty figured in every clause.

Then I sketched out the maps of the two belligerent countries as they existed in my imagination. Together they formed a large island, of which, naturally, Cravifie occupied only an insignificant part. There were seas and gulfs and rivers, mountains and towns, for which I invented the oddest names. Then I coloured the whole in pastel. I drew that map over and over and over again, modifying it, giving it a more elegant, or perhaps a more distorted, form, discovering names that sounded better, and adapting my strategical operations to the nature of the land. Every day I thought

out new operations : defiles to be stormed, mountains to be scaled, towns to be captured. And on my maps I planned the evolutions and the manœuvres of both armies.

Never did I show my companions more than a tiny fragment of my solitary labours ; not even to Pierre Martin did I show them all. To no one did I communicate the whole of the epic I had created, and in which I mentally lived. A sense of shame and the fear of ridicule arrested any such impulse. All the same, this epic kept the passion for our game burning within me ; perhaps, too, it inflamed those around with like enthusiasm.

But even the best things tire in the end. The great war died of inanition. And I, the least warlike or belligerent of all my schoolmates, was yet the only one to cherish the idea. I continued to dream of Cravifie, to transform its maps, enlarge its frontiers, and glorify its epic.

Meanwhile, an important local event took place : the official entry of the new

commander-in-chief. I was in the crowd with my mother. We lined up on the footpath behind a cordon of troops, waiting for the march past. I remember how the soldiers bandied jokes with the spectators: a thing that astonished me somewhat, for I looked upon a soldier as belonging to another world. I remember how the crowd gradually surged into the middle of the street and had to effect a hurried and disorderly retreat, being driven back by the mounted police . . .

The march past, the music, the tall figure of the general: everything amazed and dazzled me. After that, I dreamt of but one thing: the solemn entry of the president of the republic of Cravifie into his capital, on horseback. I never realized this dream of mine; it may be that the dreaming gave me greater satisfaction than the fulfilment would have done. It was then that I knew all the intoxication of glory!

The warrior imagination was aroused within me. Frequently this year, on

Saturday evenings—the only time in the week when I had not to trouble about my homework for the morrow—I would spend an hour, when it was fine, in our little garden. These were the warm evenings at the end of spring or the beginning of summer. For dessert we had had strawberries with wine: those little "all-the-year-round" strawberries, gathered from our own beds, and the taste of them was still in my mouth.

I began to run along the circular path, as though determined to make myself dizzy. I was intoxicated by the scent of lilacs, roses, and strawberries, by the odour of the moist earth which my father had been watering. I turned round and round, first trotting and then galloping. I became hot, and my head began to buzz. Then I dashed forward in a wild outburst of glory and conquest. First came my entry into the capital, and spontaneously I changed to a trot, then almost to a walking pace; it was a solemn moment and my heart was beating violently through running about;

the imaginary crowd watched me pass by. Then I started for the wars and imperceptibly began to gallop. I brandished an imaginary sword and slew phantoms. Don Quixote attacked windmills: it was the wind itself that I assailed, the gentle breeze of a June evening at which I cut and thrust. Whilst I was turning round and round, so were the swallows whirling above me, and their joyous cries and twitterings responded to my own frenzy of intoxication. Night was approaching, the whole of nature had now abdicated and my dream was kept alive by hallucinations and illusions. I won victory after victory. Finally, I returned to my capital, traversing the same streets as before, though the air now rang with acclamations of triumph. Again and again I repeated the whole performance with endless variations of the same theme.

At last I was roused by my mother's voice calling me, as she closed the blinds. I found myself still running round and round the same path. The blood had mounted to my head like strong wine.

I ran up the stairs, four at a time, impelled by the same impetuous rush of enthusiasm. I lay down, perspiration streaming from my body, my imagination aflame, and my heart continuing to beat a tattoo. After tossing about in my bed for some time I ended by falling into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

1915.

Chapter XXIII

POETRY

It is my first year at school, and I am five : a little retiring child, all crushed and rumpled in soul, too sensitive to encounter the rough contact of the outer world. I have only one or two companions ; the mistress is cold and distant, unapproachable. My mother alone understands and shares my secret emotions, except when I am afraid or ashamed of telling them to her.

I learn many things, with a sort of sporting delight, and in the spirit of alert exploration. There is also nascent in me the vain conceit of doing better than the rest . . . But now comes a more profound delight and joy, one that suddenly thrills me through and through and makes me very earnest. From out the curious and meaningless " poetry " I am made to learn and recite at home for the purpose of calling forth admiration from chance visitors ;

from out those mock-heroic stories about gluttonous and well-punished children :

(Et toute la journée il fut mélancolique,
Et l'on disait tout bas qu'il avait la colique) ;

from out this discovery of strange new words, which seem to have faces of their own and to do things—like that long, incomprehensible word : mélancolique—from out this quaint play of sounds that tickle the ear by their repetition, sounds which I have not yet learned to call rhymes : there springs a kind of poetry different from its sisters.

It is short, and yet it makes one think of things that are very great, though vague and ill-defined, things whose end cannot be seen. It is a battle-field ; it is also the approach of night. The tumult of the fight is again heard like a storm as it rolls away in the distance. I see the snow falling in the darkness, and I shiver. There lie two human beings, stretched side by side : both are wounded and both enemies, a Frenchman and a Russian. It is very cold. The Frenchman feels that he is dying. There-

upon he endeavours to cover the Russian's body with his cloak and thus save his life.

There must be tears in my mother's eyes as she explains. Before my own astonished vision appears that solemn and mysterious evening, the Frenchman's cloak which is of a dark-blue tint made even darker by the gathering shadows. The Russian is an enemy. This means that the Frenchman looks upon him as a being of an impure race, the odour of whose body is repulsive—as when one dog sniffs at another and growls.

In the same way, I scent an enemy in my class companion who is a Jew and so belongs to the race that killed Jesus Christ. He is also the son of a butcher and smells so strongly of cheese that I cannot help telling him of it. Thereupon, Madame Pierron asks me what I am whispering. I say aloud: "Madame, he smells of cheese." Madame Pierron smiles and the little Jew gets angry. How vexed I am with him! I take for granted that his whole body has an unpleasant smell, that

his feet are filthy and clammy. I reflect with feelings of voluptuous delight that he most certainly has to cut his own toe-nails ; I imagine I see them shrivel up beneath the sharp-edged knife-blade ; and I hate him. But the Frenchman in the story does not hate his enemy, he would like to do him a good turn, he overcomes his feeling of repulsion. How profoundly such noble sentiments stir me ! How is it possible to say so much in so few lines ? . . . Such were my first literary emotions.

Meanwhile, in a dark room, Father Vaté, the old almoner of the school, a tall, thin septuagenarian, with black cassock and white hair, relates to us the Bible story in tremulous accents. It is a grand narrative, abounding in very fine names : there is something about it that is calm and expansive, like the soul of the almoner himself, no doubt . . . But a day comes when the old man is no longer there : he is dead. We follow him to the grave. His age is mentioned : seventy years. In a voice composed for the occasion I remark to

Pierre Martin: "It's always the young who pass away first." And Pierre answers: "Yes," in the same contrite accent, while the procession slowly makes its way along the narrow cemetery path. Indeed, our good and kind almoner seemed young compared with the patriarchs of old; he should have lived at least as long as Methuselah. Anyone who can call forth such fine stories, which do us so much good, which make us think, should live to an old age, should live for ever, for he has not spent his time on earth in vain. Poets always die young.

* * * *

Madame Pierron had advised my mother to induce me to read daily during the holidays, in order to keep in practice. This was a task the performance of which fell upon my father. I had a prize entitled: "Français d'Alsace," one of those stories that advocated the idea of "la revanche", and which had been in the hands of French children ever since the year 1871. My father sat on my right, and, with the patience of

an angel, daily helped me to read this book, page by page, himself reading a little from time to time to encourage me. The hero was a little boy who had a younger sister; the scene was laid in a forest of lofty firs—a forest in Alsace glowing with mysterious lights. The Christmas tree was spangled with stars. This book enabled me to appreciate the poetic intimacy and the depth of feeling connected with home life in winter, the love of one's *patrie* as well as of the little *patrie* which was so close to my own. I seemed to be enveloped in Christmas music, shimmering with myriads of tiny stars.

* * * *

When I was six years old, we learned at school some of La Fontaine's fables. They seemed to me ambiguous both in language and in meaning. The words were not in their right place; it needed an effort to discover how the moral fitted into the story: a tiresome sort of moral, after all, and certainly not intended for us. But perhaps it was because of my stupidity that

I did not understand? Doubtless "the rest" understood, seeing that they never asked M. Antoine anything nor even discussed the subject with one another. Pride and the dread of ridicule kept me from asking either M. Antoine, "the rest," or mamma for an explanation. I racked my brain in my attempt to discover a particle of meaning in some of the fables.

We went through "The Fox and the Stork". The moral at the end was contained in the clean-cut, sibylline words:

Attendez-vous à la pareille.

What could that mean? Doubtless when one did wrong, one should always take care lest a photographer be in the neighbourhood with his apparatus. You must expect the apparatus . . . *s'attendre à l'appareil* . . . That was it, of course. Other tales in the reading book said the same thing: for instance, the story of the little girl who wished to hide herself in order to kill a bird, only to discover in the end that she could be seen everywhere: even in the cellar she would be seen by God. The consequence

was that she refrained from killing the bird. Yes, M. la Fontaine was quite right: One must never do wrong because one may always be photographed, even though it be by no one except God.

I was fond of reciting, though I did not always understand. I took delight in declaiming and gesticulating; if not at school, where I did not dare to indulge in this distraction, at all events, at home: and there I took myself very seriously. I once had to attend a rehearsal in connexion with acting and declamation. I thought there was nothing in the world finer than to declaim before an attentive audience. Occasionally at home I improvized something of the same kind. I would mark out a platform, bring up armchairs for the convenience of a complaisant public consisting of my father and mother. Then I would come on to the stage and intone, with a considerable degree of mimicry, poems we had learnt for school. Due applause was given and I bowed my acknowledgments.

* * * *

Now, I am in the class of "papa Riston", a kind, old man who is very fond of us. Our usual reading book is the "Tour de France par deux enfants". These are two children living at Phalsbourg, in Lorraine—Phalsbourg, an old town provided with draw-bridges. They are exiles as a result of the German conquest—"la revanche" again!—and they go from town to village, carrying their bundle at the end of a stick flung over the shoulder. They spend their first night beneath the fir-trees of the Vosges, where the mist is dense and impenetrable. They see manufacturing towns and farming districts, where the cows lick the hand that offers them salt. They come to know the people, good, honest, hard-working people: young artisans and elderly housekeepers. It is all as vivid as though one were travelling oneself . . . And after six years the two children, now grown up, return to their native village, and sit down in the self-same spot beneath the forest firs. Then they remember, and there could scarcely be imagined anything more

affecting and moving, or even more poignant than this evocation of the past, this mystery of the march of time, ourselves unconsciously keeping pace with it.

I have none but happy recollections of this year, perhaps because we like everything that is taught us by a kind-hearted old master, one capable of inspiring love. Even La Fontaine's fables—about which I did not care at all in subsequent years—now interest me. "The Fox and the Goat" is amusing; "The Wolf and the Lamb" makes me sad. I feel heart-broken at the injustice of the right of the stronger. Long do I sit there, my eyes fixed on that particular page of the book, unwilling to acknowledge that the *dénouement* is final, and expecting something more . . . which does not happen. The book also explains the morals to be drawn from the fables, by means of examples with which we are familiar. For instance, "The Wolf and the Lamb" is illustrated by a map of France with Alsace-Lorraine forming a black offensive stain, like a blot of ink on a very

clean page—for Prussia was the wolf and France the lamb—"la revanche" once more!

Papa Riston, however, was unwittingly the means of inspiring in me a deeper emotion, of a somewhat similar nature to that I had experienced two years previously in connexion with the story of the Russian and the Frenchman with the blue cloak. This was when he explained for the first time, and made us learn by heart, a poem by Victor Hugo entitled: "Après la Bataille." Victor Hugo related how his father, a general,

Parcourait à cheval, le soir d'une bataille,
Le champ couvert de morts sur qui tombait la nuit.

It was these two lines that thrilled me through and through, bringing back my vision of the past without my having to remember it at the time. That day I discovered what fine poetry was . . . The general sees a wounded enemy who asks for drink; he commands his hussar to assuage his thirst. The man then strikes the general on the brow. Without a trace of emotion:

"Donne-lui tout de même à boire," dit mon père.

Papa Riston seemed greatly moved as he explained this passage ; he gave himself up whole-heartedly to the task, thus answering the desire of the same poet when he said, with reference to the authors of old :

C'est en les pénétrant d'explication tendre,
En les faisant aimer qu'on les fera comprendre.

It is somewhat astonishing that I should clearly remember such details of an explanation which my brain . . . or perhaps my heart . . . received at the age of seven.

Papa Riston asked me to note that the first line :

Mon père, ce héros au sourire si doux,

began with the words " mon père " and that the last line ended with the same two words, proving, he said, what love and reverence Victor Hugo had for his father. Few, indeed, of our critics would have noticed this, but I felt how true it was.

As regards the striking line which had moved me so profoundly :

Le champ couvert de morts sur qui tombait la nuit,

he explained that in prose the phrase

would have read "le champ sur lequel" and not "le champ sur qui", *qui* being used only if we are referring to a person. To the poet, however, the battle-field was a living thing, just as to us children, when we were afraid, the night also seemed living. There was another, a simpler, explanation, of which the dear old man had not thought, and that was to regard *morts*, not *champ*, as the antecedent of *qui*. Nevertheless, his explanation was certainly a more poetical one, and quite in accordance with the spirit of the situation. It appeared to me both true and necessary, as it would still assuredly do, even now. It was true that the battle-field, not only to Victor Hugo but also to me, was as living as fear-producing night; it had made me shiver like the approach of the pallid, grey women in my nightmares. How living it was, indeed! And how strange that Victor Hugo, papa Riston, and myself should feel the same thing and interpret it in the same way! Personification, which in the case of La Fontaine, seemed to me artificial or

droll, in the present case appeared natural and inevitable: it was impossible to write and think otherwise.

There was one thing, especially, which struck me—a thing which had previously captured my imagination in the story of the Frenchman and the Russian—and that was the contrast between the paucity of the words and the vastness of the conception. Each word was a world in itself. The last line:

"Donne-lui tout de même à boire," dit mon père,

made you think, without saying so, of the interior struggle, the victory of goodness over vengeance, of more feelings than can easily be expressed. Its simplicity was a veritable godsend. A mere word explained the situation, and you could not help understanding. How fine it was to write in that way!

The following year, Victor Hugo was again to the fore. And once more poetry shows itself to be identified with the love of mankind:

Je suis la Charité l'amie,
Qui se réveille avant le jour,
Quand la nature est endormie,
Et que Dieu m'a dit: A ton tour!

Nor does this personification of Charity shock me. It neither strains nor distorts reality; rather does it enhance its value, adding something impalpable which makes it all the more beautiful. I see this woman, Charity, running up to the hut, pushing open the door, and with her hands, warming the bare feet of the poor little children:

J'accours, car la saison est dure,
J'accours, car l'indigent a froid,
J'accours, car la tiède verdure
Ne fait plus d'ombre sur le toit.

I still remember how M. Seaux, the master of the eighth class in which I was at the time, explained this strophe. He told us that the second "J'accours" was more exacting than the first, and the third more insistent than the second. It was not a case of repetition, such as we were blamed for in our home-work. It was a gradation, a sort of *crescendo* as in music,

and this must be expressed by the tone of voice in reciting. Each "J'accours" had to be uttered more briefly and powerfully than the previous one: somewhat like three answers to three cries of distress, each more desperate and urgent than the last. This constituted the principal difficulty of the piece. My ingenuity was taxed to work up my diction, and it was no easy matter to say the third "J'accours" without a shriek.

I found something that moved me also in certain lines of prose in our reading-book. The title was "L'Automne". I do not remember who was the author. The long, rhythmical sentences, like the moaning wind that swells, groans, and dies away, sent a new kind of tremor through my frame, a thrill quite as entrancing as that caused by the poems I loved best. I seemed to feel the gloomy vastnesses of forests echoing with the gun shots of the hunter, and of highways broken up by rain and storm. The writer said as follows of all these things (I still remember the passage): "Some,

people hate, and others love them madly; I am one of those who love them, and I would give ten springs for a single autumn." This was paradoxical, contrary to what was generally accepted, but within myself I felt something which secretly approved, and I dimly understood that there existed men, writers, who had put into words some of those things that one ponders over in one's inmost self, without daring to say them, without even knowing them. Nothing could have been more intense, more pervading and subtle than this strange feeling of confidence.

M. Seaux also taught us, probably in connexion with "La Charité", how poems are composed. I was quite aware that they must have been composed once, but so far were they beyond me that I should never have imagined myself also capable of writing them. When I found that all that was needed was to count the syllables on one's fingers and add a rhyme on to the end, I at once set to work.

The subject I chose was the eruption of

Mount Pelée, a subject of general interest at the time. I made a conscientious count on my fingers, going over it several times, never quite sure that I had not made a mistake. I discovered that certain syllables were troublesome and inconvenient, it being difficult to say whether they were to be counted or not; the same lines would give me now six, now seven, and now eight. I audaciously overlooked these difficulties. Again, one rhyme would call up others. To rhyme with *Montagne Pelée,* I described lava—of which I had but the faintest and most vague idea—as *une espèce d'eau salée.* I was not certain that this was quite correct, but then, in the poems one reads in books, there were to be found things of the same kind. Not without a scruple I let it pass and went on, boldly launching out as follows:

De la Montagne Pelée
S'échappe avec furie
Une sorte d'eau salée . . .

Afterwards a more sentimental vein was introduced, for this "eau salée"

A bientôt pris le chemin
De la ville de Saint-Pierre
Dont les habitants se serrent
En murmurant "Pauvre terre!"

What I meant to say was that the townspeople, with tears in their eyes, fling themselves into one another's arms; all the same my inner vision was certainly more pathetic than these poor, reedy lines. Still, you cannot say all you want when the number of syllables is so strictly curtailed! In short, I found I was harassed by too many scruples, and I saw innumerable difficulties ahead; the consequence being that I gave up, if I remember aright, before reaching the tenth line. Another attempt, a poem on the Twelve Months, came to an even speedier and more wretched end.

1918.

Chapter XXIV

THE ANGUISH OF LOVE

I am lying ill in the big bed. It is winter, and the shades of evening are entering the room, enveloping me in a shroud of sadness. The silence is crushing, and I feel very lonely. True, papa is by my side, but he says scarcely anything. He does not know the kind of words to utter that would do me good, and just lets the moments drift along as he sits there in vague reverie. It may be that he finds perfect harmony between old age and this winter evening. Or he may be dwelling on that inconceivable number of years through which he has passed, years full of activity, including the crossing of oceans, life in China and Mexico, things heroic and vast, of which the little that I know fills me with wondering fascination, almost with terror. Though close by my bedside, my father is far from me in thought; he no more knows me than I know him, and I feel

grievously alone and am obsessed by the approach of night with the grey, silent army of its phantoms and nightmares. Even now a "steam roller" emerges from the curtains.

Mamma is in town. She has gone to call on my schoolmate, Raymond Tout, to find out what are my homework and lessons, so that I may keep up with the rest. This is in accordance with my own wish, for I greatly fear I shall be behind them when I return to school, cured. Was I even now—a little fellow of six or seven—so enamoured of glory, was I already consumed by that voracious ambition which was ever present with me later on throughout my student days, or was it still the anxious fear lest I should not do very well and so incur blame, at a time when an impatient word or an expression of reproach hurt me indescribably? I do not know. After all, I imagine that my passion for being first at all costs largely resulted from this fear and suffering, from a kind of moral epidermis

that was too keenly sensitive to sharp and cutting words . . . As this dread of being behindhand with my work, this obsession of making up for lost time, would have done me more harm than studying my lessons, mamma had been compelled to give in to her obstinate, little patient, though it was an obstinacy of which she was proud—as I well know.

Time hangs heavy for a child in bed, when darkness begins to fill the room and to stalk about. Mamma is very late in returning. A feeling of anguish begins to come over me. I mention this to papa, who replies with reassuring words. Still, the thought comes to me that mamma may have been run over by some conveyance or other, by a tram, a steam-roller . . . As it happens, Raymond lives in the Rue du Grand Verger, where there actually are steam rollers . . . In vain do I try to drive the thought out of my head, it becomes only the more obtrusive. I should like to keep in my own breast this fear which I am a little ashamed of expressing, but I cannot;

it comes tumbling out of my lips, and in giving it utterance I seem to have given it substance and reality as well: tears spring to my eyes before I have finished the sentence. Then follows a burst of emotion . . . too long restrained. I rise to my knees, and then stand upright in bed, weeping and sobbing as though I were heart-broken. As I am feverish, papa becomes uneasy; he gently explains that I must keep warm, that mamma will soon be back. But he has been promising that mamma will be back for the last hour and she is not back yet. And as mamma has been run over, there is no longer any need for me to keep warm, I would rather die of fever at once! Papa does not understand; all this has no effect on him. His repeated attempts to console me in the same way as before fill me with impatience. Besides, he does not know how to attend to me properly, and his awkwardness makes me still more irritable . . . His eyes, too, become moist, his voice trembles. I do not see that what affects him is the *naïveté*

of my childish grief and sorrow. He weeps: then it must be quite true that some great misfortune has befallen us both? This brings me nearer to papa; there surges over me a wave of love for him, and my own weeping becomes quieter and calmer.

My father! Strange how often, from the depths of memory, I conjure this image of him, with tear-stained eyes and tender, trembling voice! It is the clearest, the most precious vision of him that I have retained.

* * * *

That evening's pain and anguish came back very frequently every time mamma went out without me. Even at the age of nine or ten I experienced it. The only difference was that I then thought it too ridiculous, and so did not utter a word to anyone. Nevertheless, the sense of uncertainty was intolerable. Then I would consult the oracle. I had noticed that God never answered prayers, or even direct questions. The consequence was that, in

unconscious imitation of our ancestors who were tortured by the same anxiety and met with the same cold silence from Heaven, I thought I, too, would have my own oracles, as they had. I did not, like them, interrogate the entrails of animals or the flight of ravens. This is how I set about it.

At that time, my father would spend the whole day in his armchair. No longer could he endure noise of any kind. Now, when I felt bored, I had got into the habit of crouching down like a toad, and jumping about the room. Whenever I played this game, I was sure my father would tell me to stop, after a few leaps. And so, no sooner had mamma gone out and I had begun to feel anxious, than I decided mentally that I would pretend to be a toad, and would count my leaps. If my father protested before the twelfth leap—or the fifteenth—this would mean that mamma had got run over. If I went beyond the fatal number . . . then she was safe. But when the answer was unlucky, I would

begin again a few minutes afterwards, until I felt somewhat reassured.

All this, which took place in the past, is very childish and laughable. But when this past became the sad and painful present, how was I to express, or even evoke within myself, the mute torture of an ever anxious passion, a sense of distress so keen and heavy that I had to create a religion of my own to help me to bear it ?

1917.

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